

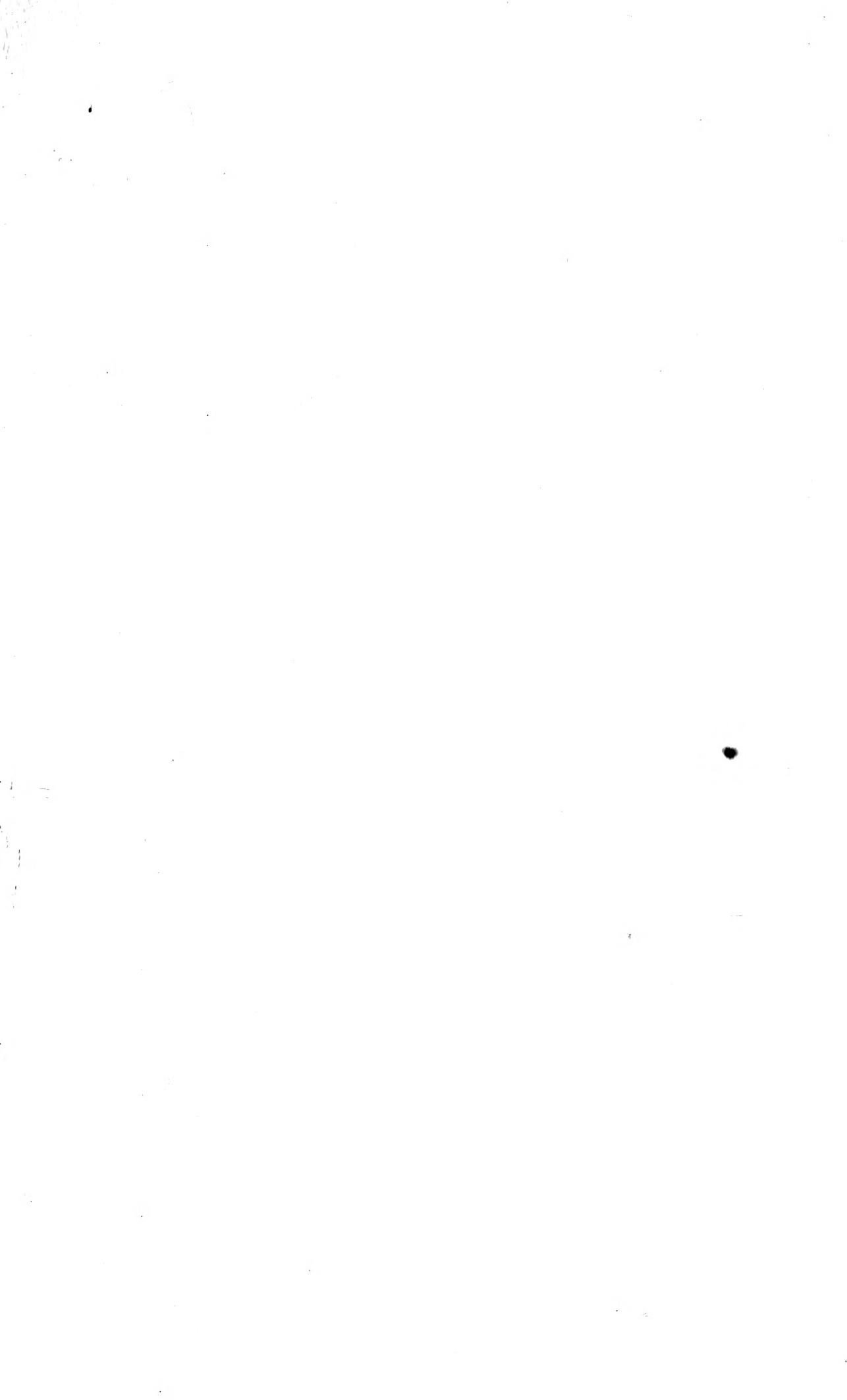


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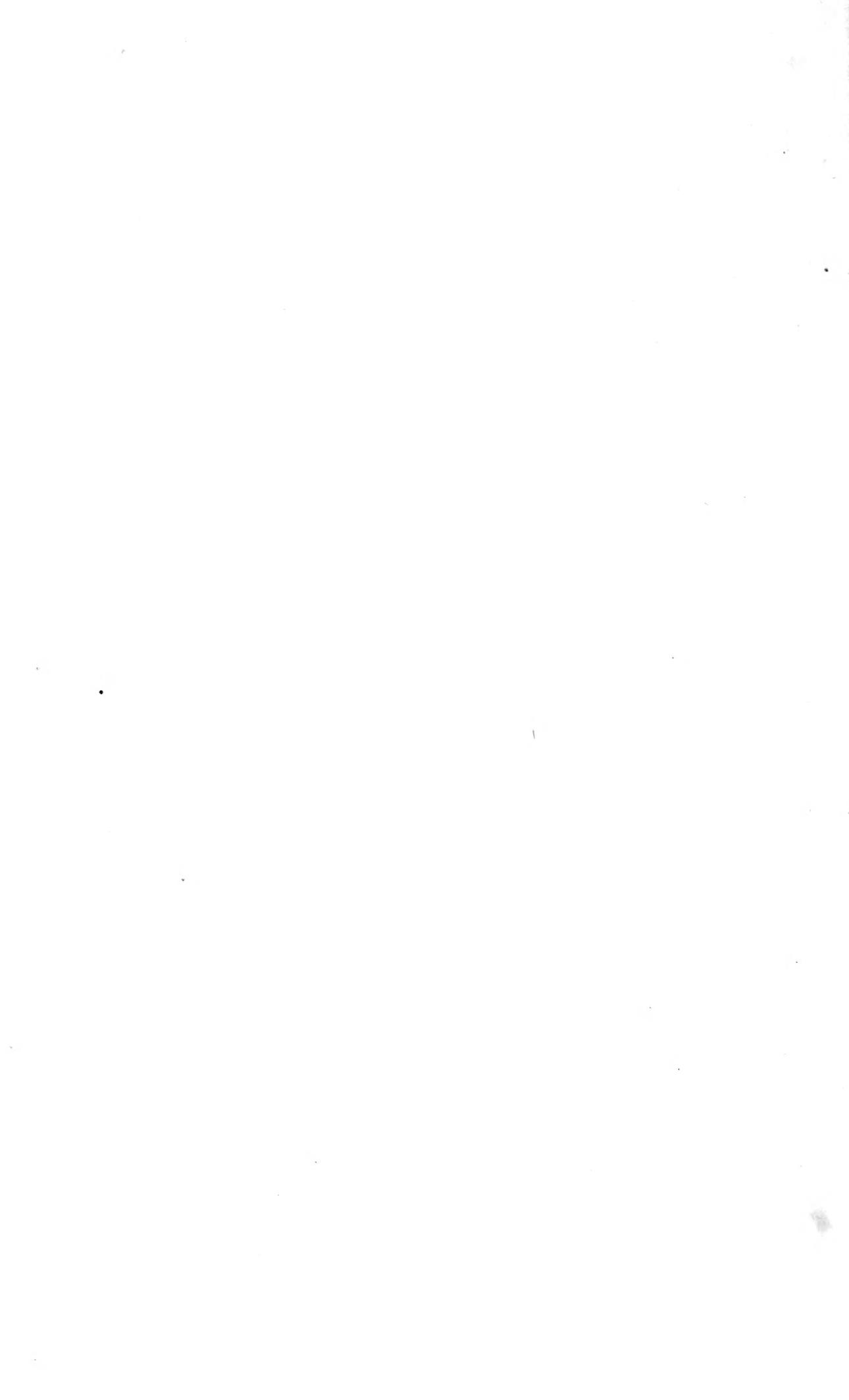








CREATURES OF CLAY



CREATURES OF CLAY

A Novel.

BY

LADY VIOLET GREVILLE,

AUTHOR OF "ZOE," "KEITH'S WIFE," ETC.

Ye children of man ! Whose life is a span,
Protracted with sorrow from day to day,
Naked and featherless, feeble and querulous,
Sickly, calamitous Creatures of Clay."

ARISTOPHANES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON—CHAPMAN AND HALL
LIMITED.

1885.

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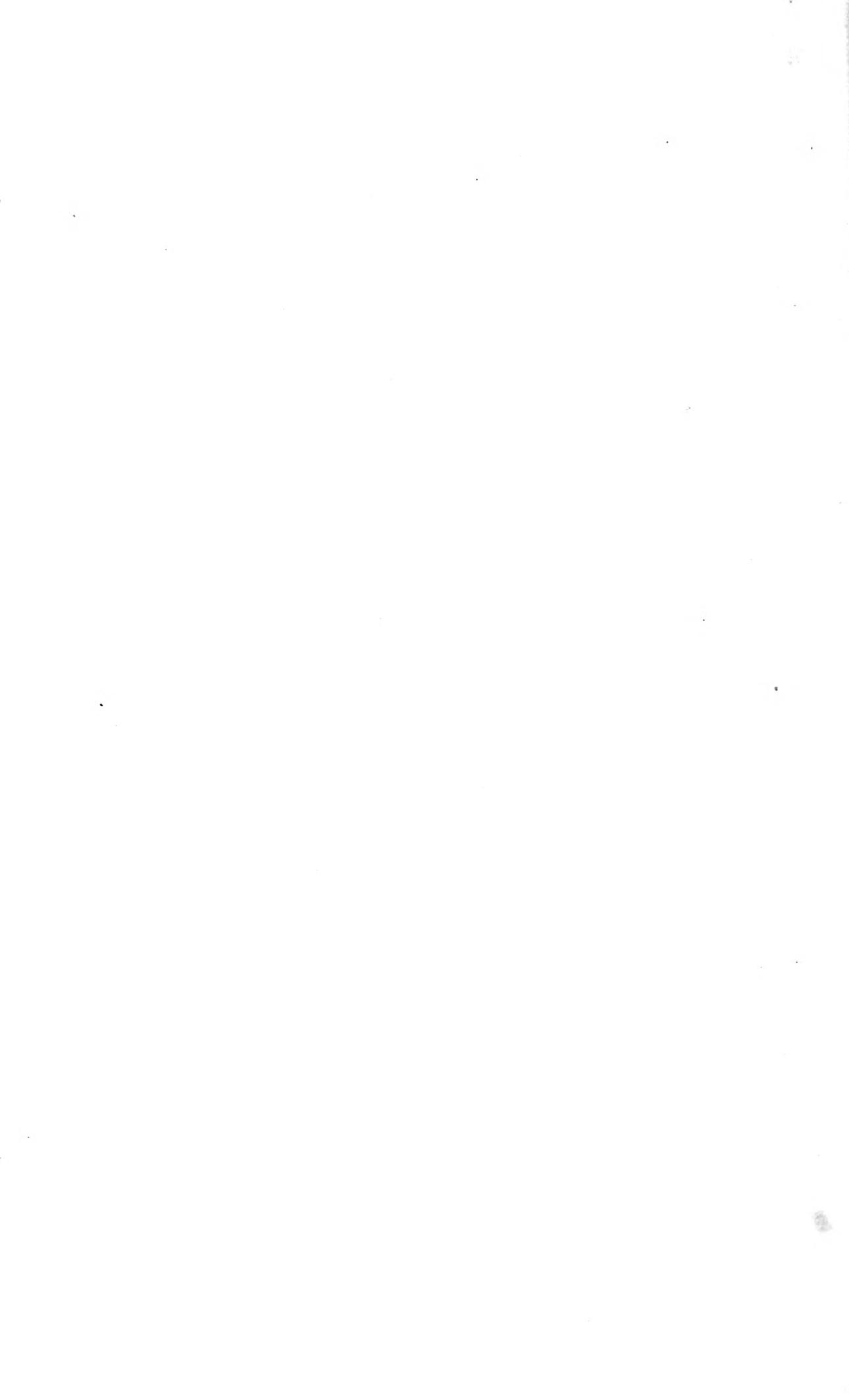
WESTMINSTER:
PRINTED BY NICHOLS AND SONS,
25, PARLIAMENT STREET.

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CREATURES OF CLAY.

CHAPTER I.

It was August in London, dull, hot, stifling weather, when the sky looks brazen, the prematurely-faded yellow leaves begin to flutter and fall from the grimy trees in the parks, and the streets become dusty and ill-odorous. Dirty bits of paper fly up and about in the scorching scirrocco-like air, everybody of any importance is out of town ; the blinds of fashionable houses are closed, and the care-takers go about in curl-papers and slippers.

On such a day a young man, morosely chewing at a cigar, sat in the window of one of the few West End clubs that was not shut up in consequence of cleaning or repairs. He had a bright, fair, young, English face, which at that instant wore an evil expression of angry despair, evidently foreign to its

character. After a few moments of sullen reflection, the young man rose and walked to the chimney-piece, against which he rested his forehead gloomily.

“I say, Dick,” exclaimed another young man who was reading the paper at a little distance, “why don’t you answer? I asked you if you knew that Evelyn Bray, the girl we met at the Milners in the summer, that time at Henley, you know, when we had such jolly water-parties, was just married to old Sir Hilary Fenchurch.”

“I didn’t know it till you read out the news just now,” answered his friend, sullenly.

“She was very good-looking,” mused the other, “and I suppose she thinks she has made a good thing of it, for I believe she is an orphan without a penny—seems rather a pity though, doesn’t it? He must be old enough for her father.”

“Rather a pity! I should just think it was; it’s *disgusting* to see a girl sell herself like that.”

“Oh well, my dear fellow, it doesn’t do to be too hard upon them, poor things, it is their profession, you know, like the army for me ——”

“A vile profession !” said Dick, vindictively.

“What a bad temper you are in to-day, what’s the matter, eh ?” said the other, stretching himself more luxuriously in his deep arm-chair, and extending a languid hand to the glass of iced lemon and soda-water that stood on a little table beside him. “Tailor sent your bill in—or lost at Goodwood, eh ?”

“Neither. I’m only sick of the folly of the life we lead ; what’s the good of it all ? How long will it last ? Women cheat, men lie and rob you, and—its confoundedly hot.”

“So it is, but you can’t reform the world ; get as much fun as you can out of it, that’s my maxim, and don’t fuss yourself.”

“*You* never fussed yourself, I’m sure,” sneered Dick.

“Never. It don’t pay.”

“I should like to know what *does* pay. Fellows grumble at the army, the navy, their wives, their people—everything.”

“At least, *you* can’t grumble. You have all that a man can want, nothing to do, splendid prospects, and a grandmother who will stand you any amount of money.”

Dick was silent. The bitterness he felt was too deep for words. Presently he quitted the club and his contented friend, who, left in solitude, dropped off into peaceful slumbers for the rest of the afternoon, and woke up, cool and refreshed, just in time for dinner. Dick, on the contrary, once in the street, walked on quickly, regardless of the heat, until he reached his lodgings, where he set to work energetically to pack a portmanteau.

Dick Carrol was a spoilt favourite of fortune. He had been brought up by an adoring grandmother, and pampered by society, who beheld in him the possible heir to a large fortune. He had scarcely ever been contradicted, and never knew what it was to receive the thing expressed by that salutary but disagreeable figure of speech, a slap in the face. Dick now, for the first time in his life, was hopelessly, stupidly, wretchedly in love. And, having informed his goddess of this condition of things, which ought to have made some impression upon her heart, he was forced to read of her marriage to another, an elderly, commonplace, country baronet. Not only therefore

was she unfaithful and unappreciative, but she was also mercenary. Dick, maddened and impetuous, resolved to revenge himself. He would wildly pursue, would taunt, upbraid, and dismay her. The newspaper informed him that the happy couple were gone to Switzerland (happy couple indeed)! Dick ground his teeth, he saw it was not a large country on the map, he would scour the country, search every hotel, and find them. In this frame of mind he left England, and, soon enough, came upon the traces of his beloved and unfaithful mistress.

Meanwhile, Sir Hilary and Lady Fenchurch had been married a fortnight, and the time allotted to the honeymoon, which, according to the roving habits of the English people, they had been spending in Switzerland, was nearly exhausted. The link that bound husband and wife together was partly new and partly old. Evelyn Bray, the orphan daughter of a poor gentleman, had lived with her guardian, Sir Hilary Fenchurch, and his sister, for several years, until the time appointed for the ratification of the solemn promise Sir Hilary had made to her dying father arrived,

and he had claimed her for his wife. Evelyn made no objection ; Sir Hilary was about thirty years older than herself, but he was a kindly as well as a rich man, and she had been brought up to value her future position, and to consult his habits and wishes. She was docile and gentle, not particularly imaginative, and possessed all the woman's love of luxuries and comforts. She only vaguely realized the irreversability of the marriage tie, nor did she anticipate any great or pleasurable result from the change in her condition. Once married, Sir Hilary treated her in his usual fashion, pleasantly, considerately, with a tinge of old-fashioned courtly deference in his manner, which was rather flattering to a young creature, but with none of a lover's warmth. Evelyn was grateful to him for this concession, for the sight of an amorous middle-aged man disporting himself in fond caresses is a somewhat disagreeable spectacle, and, though Lady Fen-church entertained a calm affection for Sir Hilary, any exhibition of passion on his part would only have alarmed and disgusted her. Those persons who were staying in the

pleasantly picturesque mountain resort where Sir Hilary and his wife elected to pass a few days observed the new-married couple walking up and down, arm in arm, in the early morning, (while Sir Hilary drank a couple of glasses of some nauseous water, recommended by the doctors for his periodical attacks of gout), and noticed with surprise the happy union of December and May. Yet, as every bright thing has its reverse, so when Evelyn remained alone, and Sir Hilary took a longer or steeper pedestrian stretch, the placid expression of her face underwent a considerable change. At such times she would wander into some solitary part of the woods, nominally intent on sketching purposes, in reality a prey to disagreeable thoughts. For she then recalled to her mind an episode of the last few months which she had not confided to Sir Hilary, and which, though it left her outward circumstances unchanged, considerably modified her inner life. While on a visit to a friend, but a few weeks before her marriage, she met a handsome young man. They walked and talked together in the intimacy of country-house life, grew to understand and appreciate each other, until one day he told her he loved

her. And she, hearing such strange and pleasant words, and for a moment forgetting the rigid future in store for her, including Sir Hilary and the comfortable settlement to which she was destined, listened eagerly. Listened to the detriment of her peace and the loss of her self-respect, yet with the lightness of her age and sex snatching at the forbidden pleasure, and drinking in the words of flattering love. Then, woman-like, when her lover pressed her to throw off the conventional shackles that bound her, she dared not, and, true to neither, married one man while her heart was given to another. Powerless and disinclined to forget a part of which she was now ashamed, she weakly feared to speak of this to her husband. For, she argued, what was there to tell ? She had sent her lover away, assured him that what he asked was imposssible, that he must never think of her, that he must never again see her—in short, all the pretty insincere vows and protestations that women hard-pressed are wont to utter. She left the house, feeling she had acted honourably; she heard no more of him, and believed he had forgotten her, yet, strangely enough,

indeed, this last thought increased her regret. Occasionally, overcome by temptation, she would put down her drawing materials, and, leaning her head on her hand as she sat among the cool green ferns and mosses, think of the past with tearful sorrow; then, after a little, remembering Sir Hilary, bestir herself and walk home, her hollow eyes and pale cheeks rising up as witnesses against her. This was certainly an uncomfortable and a useless way of passing a honeymoon, and poor Evelyn sometimes feared that Sir Hilary, plain and practical as he was, might suspect something unusual. At other times her speculations led her to wonder aimlessly where her lover might be, and if he had really consoled himself for her loss with his pretty cousin Maud, to whom the world's gossip already married him; but when they reached this point her speculations invariably ended in tears. Even the most heroically prudish woman does not like to feel that she is forgotten. By dint of musing over these sad and hopeless reminiscences Evelyn attained to a gentle melancholy and an uncontrollable desire to see once more, if only to take a pathetic farewell of him, the hero of her

dreams. One afternoon especially, when she had plunged as usual into the recesses of the pine-woods and walked listlessly to a spot whence she could see range upon range of distant snow-capped peaks melting into a dim blue distance or standing out sharply against the clear sky, silent and wonderful in their majesty; the longing to see Dick grew more intense than ever, and she permitted her thoughts to stray back to those bright halcyon days of lovemaking which now seemed to her so precious, but which at the time she had not sufficiently valued. They were irrevocably gone, no longings could recall them, why might she not therefore retrace that happy time as if it concerned some one else and not herself? Thinking thus, she mused luxuriously in a kind of melancholy rapture and was scarcely surprised to see before her the object of her thoughts, who after severe travelling had discovered her abode, and followed her in her solitary walk. She felt pleased and yet a little frightened. Such a pursuit scarcely argued forgetfulness, and though agreeable to dream of a lover it might not be so easy to deal with him in flesh and blood.

Dick left London with the intention of indulging in a series of melodramatic reproaches; instead, as he saw the startled face of a pretty girl before him, he threw himself down beside her, and, taking her hand gently, said “Evelyn!” Love was more prominent than reproach in this adjuration, and as to revenge he had totally forgotten its existence.

“Evelyn, why have you behaved so cruelly? Why did you marry another man when I loved you and you knew it?”

Youth always considers its own rights first.

“I said that our love—your love—was wrong and foolish,” stammered Evelyn.

“I can’t see that; you were not obliged to marry Sir Hilary.”

“I could not help it, our engagement had lasted so long. Papa wished it, and on his deathbed Sir Hilary promised him he would marry me, and I —”

“And for some silly idea of duty you have spoilt my life and yours. I never believed you really meant it; I thought that, if I gave you time and did not worry you, you would understand—would relent. I loved you, Evelyn, and when a man loves

he deserves some consideration," said Dick, reproachfully.

"Indeed, I am very sorry."

"*Very sorry!* you speak like a little school-girl; didn't you love me?"

"Well—you said so;" the coquette in her nature asserted itself.

"You might at least have waited a bit, have given a fellow some chance."

"There was no use in waiting."

"Everything would have come right if you had only waited," he argued again impatiently.

"Yes, but I could not," she said softly.

"You were very cruel."

"Cruel to myself, don't you think I suffered? but then I knew it was right."

"Right, right! you women only think of yourselves; what a man feels is nothing. If you had only trusted me, instead of sending me away—to read your marriage one day in a newspaper."

"But Sir Hilary?"

"Hang Sir Hilary! What a situation for you! a prim old fellow, who will be just as fond of the Board of Guardians or of his

turnips as of his wife ; who won't understand you or share your pleasures."

"He is very kind," she whispered, trying to palliate to her conscience the sin of hearing her husband's character discussed.

"Can you not believe that I should have been kinder?"

Tears stood in Evelyn's eyes. She was pitying herself, and imagining what immeasurable bliss Dick's affection would have afforded her. He saw his advantage.

"Do you not know that men have strong passions, that they can feel? Ay! as you never felt in your life, hedged in by all your tepid ideas of duty and sentiment."

"Oh, Dick! forgive me--forget me."

"Forget you! and if I cannot? if you're the first woman I ever really loved?—if you seem to have taken away my very heart with you?—if—oh! I cannot bear it, Evelyn! I came all this way just to see you, just to tell you, for once, what I think of you—of a girl who plays with a man as you did! You *shall* hear!" he emphasized, as she tried to rise. "I loved you, and you jilted me for a rich old man."

"Oh! Dick! Dick! how can you?" she

cried, fairly frightened now, and wondering how she should get rid of him. “ I could not help it—indeed I could not if I loved you.”

“ You loved me!—you love me still!—you’re *miserable*! I’m glad you’re miserable, Lady Fenchurch !”

He jumped up and stood over her, lashing himself into a rage as he spoke. Her head sank lower and lower ; she picked nervously with her fingers at the tiny grasses. She was a little ashamed, and not a little alarmed.

“ Do not let us reproach each other,” she said quietly, though her heart beat fast. “ We have been rudely parted, I know ; and I assure you I have suffered bitterly ; but I will try to bear my burden, and you must try to bear yours—for my sake, please.”

Her voice faltered. He looked at her, first angrily, then kindly, then triumphantly. He thought he saw the weakness in the strength she tried to assume.

“ For *your* sake! Women always say that.”

“ The loss of a woman, after all, is

nothing in a man's life. You are a noble fellow ; you are sure to do what is right ; —forget ——”

She could say no more. The tears rushed to her eyes, yet she felt a sense of pride almost as great as if she had won a victory. He threw himself again beside her, and pressed her hand in his.

“ Evelyn, these heroics are absurd. Why shouldn't we be happy ? why should our life be spoiled ? You have been married through a terrible misunderstanding ; you could not help it, I know, but you will *never* love Sir Hilary ; never be happy. Come with me—come. I will love you and care for you.”

She put out her hands as if to keep him off, and shrank away ; she had no desire to outrage society.

“ No, no ! not that ; never say that again. such things are nonsense,” she said.

“ Nonsense—Ah, I thought you could not love me,” he said gloomily. “ Yet I cannot bear to see you wretched all your life.”

“ I shall not be wretched,” she said, with a little forced laugh ; “ I mean to enjoy my-

self, to be very good; Sir Hilary is most indulgent."

"You don't love me; and I was a fool to think so," he said angrily.

"It *must* be as I said, Dick," she answered severely; "you know it *must*."

"Must be—must be!" muttered the young man, impatiently, feeling, for the first time in his life, an impracticable barrier opposed to his wishes. "Of course, it is for you to decide; if you tell me of your own free will to go, I *must*; but —"

"I do tell you—I wish it."

He looked at her keenly. Her voice sounded firm and clear; she evidently meant it. *His* happiness was nothing to her; she had chosen her own line and intended to keep to it. After all, perhaps, she was right, there would be complications—and men did not die of love. Still he hesitated; she was so beautiful; no woman had ever appeared to him so beautiful before, and he was unaccustomed to be jilted; the circumstances were usually reversed, girls had cared hopelessly for *him*, and he had never given them a thought.

"Evelyn! Evelyn! pray reflect! you

cannot send me away so." No answer. She was very pale. And yet much calmer than, in his infatuation, he would have expected. He rose slowly to his feet, waiting for her to speak, "I am going," he said, "Haven't you a word for me? Won't you change your mind, darling? I *do* love you so."

She rose also, and held out her hand, turning away her head.

"Good-bye, forgive me," she said, quietly.

Then he jerked away her hand, and in another instant the crashing of the bushes told her he was gone. Pale and trembling, she steadied herself against the trunk of a pinetree, thoroughly exhausted and unnerved. The sweet wild pink scented the air with its fragrance, and the silver tinkle of the cowbells sounded merrily from the valley, but she saw and felt nothing. Her heart seemed to stand still and a great veil of darkness obscured her sight. How hard it had been to convince him, what a pang it had cost her! Presently, as in a dream, she walked on. The sun had set quite suddenly, as happens in mountainous regions, and the hills, but recently bathed in gleams of

roseate light were now a sombre violet, a small pale evening star twinkled above, and the air was tinged with a sharp and frosty coolness. She fell benumbed morally and physically, and the chill air revived her.

When she reached home she found Sir Hilary waiting and somewhat anxious. He gently chid her for staying out so late, and her conscience smote her as she saw that he looked pale and worried. If he had but known on what a thread her future happiness still hung.

“The papers are come,” he said, looking as unlike a jealous husband as possible, “sit down here, you will like to read them.”

Gladly hailing this as a relief from conversation, she sat down, until by degrees she was able to control her nervousness and the tremulous tones of her voice.

In the morning a note was handed her by the chambermaid. It contained only a few lines:

“You have willed it so. I leave tomorrow. Still I give you one chance more before I go. (I know not *where*, to do *what*!) Give myself to the Devil, I suppose. Evelyn, do you really wish me

to leave you ? If not send me a line to the hotel, where I shall wait all day.

“ Yours till death,

“ D.”

Evelyn crumpled the paper together in her hands when she had read it. “ Why does he try to tempt me, and make me run such risks ? ” she cried ; “ it is cruel, shameful ! ” Yet many a time during that dreadfully long hot day did she feel inclined to waver, to be a flirt, and to say, “ Come back, do not leave me, be my friend.”

Surely, she might at least have kept him as a friend,—she was innocent of all wrong-doing, and determined to continue to act honestly ; but the sight of his countenance would have been pleasant ; why need she deny herself that happiness ? Once she seized a pen and began to write, then dropping it buried her face in her hands, “ Oh ! how weak I am, how wicked ! ” She glanced at the clock and thought the day interminable ; it was kind at least of Sir Hilary to leave her alone and prolong his constitutional beyond the usual limits —soon, very soon, the feverish hours would

pass and she would regain calm and quiet again.

Outside every-day life proceeded merrily, carts and carriages rattled along, drivers cracked their whips with a will, bells jingled and dust bepowdered the red carnations at the window and flew lightly into the room.

Three o'clock, four o'clock, dusk, then evening came. Evelyn lay on the sofa. Her head ached. Meantime Dick, half mad with rage and disappointment, sat biting at a cigar and listening to every sound in the hotel. To the very last he hoped and believed in his influence over her. She had seemed so affectionate, so pliable, before her marriage, that he could not realize the sudden change. He never considered what was to follow, or what their lives would have been in the future; he never asked himself these questions; he was young and sanguine, and he loved her. That was enough. Occasionally, indeed, he remorsefully remembered his grandmother, who bestowed on him a handsome allowance, whose heir he was supposed to be, and who had hitherto proved invariably indulgent to

all his follies. She was old and the shock might harm her, kill her perhaps. No, no, he said to himself, he would manage her, talk to her, old folks were not so sensitive, she would forgive him, and they would all be happy eventually. Then as the hours flew by he grew angry. Evelyn was selfish, she did not love him; she must always have intended to deceive him; she told him of her engagement, certainly, but he had never believed her marriage to be so near and so irrevocable. The news dealt his hopes and his vanity a severe blow. He had undertaken a long journey counting on his influence over her, and it had proved useless. No wonder he was angry, disappointed, and miserable.

Night merged into morning, yet she did not write. What a fool he was to have believed in, to have cared for, her. It proved that women were, as men had often said in his hearing, only heartless coquettes. Never again would he love. Then, with a great revulsion of feeling, he began to question whether his passion had been of so durable, so intense a nature. He was very young, and life with all its possi-

bilities lay before him, perhaps on the whole it was best for him so, best that she had not consented to his prayer. He was still free! Then, almost with joy and a great longing to shake the soil of the hateful place from his feet, he departed.

The dust and hubbub of his travelling-carriage reached the room where Evelyn lay, wakefully tormenting herself with sad thoughts; but no presentiment warned her that the crisis in her fate was passed, and that henceforth a new chapter of her life would begin.

In such rude fashion ended Evelyn's honeymoon, and in October the newly-married pair returned to Oakdene,—Evelyn quietly taking on pretty little matronly airs and Sir Hilary seeming ruddy and cheerful among his partridges and his turnips.

With the kind of sensation, as though she had dropped down to earth from some fair fairyland, Evelyn took up existence as she had left it, listened to Miss Fenchurch's long pointless monologues, walked down the silent oaken galleries, passed through the unused drawing-room, shrouded in holland covers and fragrant with a faint smell of potpourri

and camphor, held colloquies with the house-keeper over jams and preserves, and heard herself called distantly “My Lady” by familiar voices who had hitherto said “Miss Evelyn.” Everything was quite the same and yet really everything was quite different. Miss Fenchurch formally resigned the keys and no longer made tea at breakfast, an arrangement which enabled her to knit indefatigably during the meal; but the gust of passion had passed over Evelyn’s soul and she could not forget. To herself she was still Evelyn, not Lady Fenchurch, and no formal ceremony of resigning keys could force the fact upon her.

“She moped,” Miss Fenchurch said; “it was sad for a married woman to sit about reading novels and dreaming away half the day—let her take some exercise.”

“Hunting,” suggested Sir Hilary, cheerily.

“Certainly not! what are you thinking of, my dear brother, a married woman?—most injurious to the health.” Sir Hilary subsided, with a conscious chuckle.

Evelyn flamed out, “Why not, pray? why should I not? I love riding, Hilary; I will go out hunting with you to-morrow.”

Miss Fenchurch shook her head, and Sir Hilary, puzzled, glanced from one to the other.

A considerable portion of Evelyn's time was occupied by the never-ending callers, who, partly impelled by curiosity, and partly for want of something to do, inflicted themselves on the young bride. They had known her for years as Evelyn Bray, but Evelyn Fenchurch possessed the charm of novelty. Each person reported what kind of dress she was wearing, what wedding presents lay on the table, whether the jewellery displayed was handsome or betokened stinginess on the part of Sir Hilary, regretting that the family diamonds, of course, could only be seen to advantage at the next county ball. How Lady Fenchurch bore herself, whether she looked happy, why the marriage had been celebrated in perfect privacy in town, and whether she had improved in looks, afforded food for much gossip and a great deal of very agreeable tea-drinking. Opinions were divided as to whether she would be an addition to the county society or not. Of course, if she entertained and spent some of the money which Sir Hilary had hitherto so

carefully hoarded, it would be well enough. Did he intend to stand for Parliament, and would his wife make herself popular, were the further questions the county asked itself, and to which it eagerly awaited the answers.

CHAPTER II.

DICK went into Italy, dawdled away a fortnight at Venice, took a run down to Rome, and discovered, with surprise, that foreign travel was in no ways distracting. Disgusted and sore at heart he returned to England. The first person he stumbled up against in London was his cousin, Maud Hardfast, whose joy at meeting him was at least refreshing. Though a very handsome girl, she had not succeeded in making a match, and it occurred to her that Dick was a chance not to be thrown away. Partly owing to her own talents as an accomplished flirt, and partly to her mother's straitened circumstances, the two women were regarded by society in the light of hawks ready to swoop down on any marriageable young man, and were universally exposed to detraction

by their own sex accordingly. To be “skied” at the academy, to write poems which nobody will read, to breed cattle who die of pleuro-pneumonia the week before the show at which in all likelihood they must have taken prizes, are bitter things indeed, yet not more fraught with bitterness than the feelings of a hawked-about girl, who displays her wares in vain, and leaves London season after season, ticketed “unsaleable.” So Maud’s face brightened as she beheld her cousin, and thought that there was still some hope of her obtaining a desirable husband.

“Where do you come from? What luck to find you in town!” she said, sweetly.

“I’ve come from Dover,” he answered, rather ungraciously, hating to be cross-questioned. “I’ve been travelling abroad.”

But Maud knew men’s ways. She soon smoothed down his ruffled features, and by gentle means drove away his ill-temper, with the result that he promised to visit her mother on the morrow.

Dick felt terribly bored, with the ennui that comes from a total want of any interest in life, and almost any distraction seemed good to him at that moment. So in an

ardourless and yet expectant mood he presented himself at Mrs. Hardfast's house. It was part of the latter's principles never to parade economy in any shape, her house was as daintily furnished, her chintzes as fresh, her muslin curtains as snowy as possible ; if the servants complained of scanty wages, hard work, and numerous petty makeshifts, and if stinginess were practised in secret, yet nothing of this was evident to Mrs. Hardfast's friends. The ladies dined out a great deal, and when there came no invitations contented themselves with a slender tea and food that a pampered footman would have rejected. But then Maud's ball-dresses were beautiful, and her mother prided herself on being a wondrous manager. The cool atmosphere of the little drawing-room formed a delightful contrast on this broiling September day ; sweet-smelling flowers filled innumerable glasses on the table, and Maud herself, dressed in the airiest and lightest of garments, radiated smiles and amiability. After the soul-tempests Dick had undergone, and the gradual conviction that was stealing over him that he had made an egregious fool

of himself, it suited him to talk of nothings, and fling about the light ball of flimsy society talk. Maud knew all the gossip, and had a perfect store of amusing bits of scandal to relate, so that the time passed pleasantly, and he found little hesitation in staying for five-o'clock tea, then staying on to dinner, finally promising to call again on the morrow. Maud was a wise girl in her generation; she showed him nothing but the frankest cordiality, without a spice of coquetry, and soon restored him to good humour and a belief in himself, not one of the least remarkable results of a clever woman's tact. Things continued on this footing, Maud gradually edging herself into his confidence, and resuming her cousinly authority, which had been, to some extent, shaken during his infatuation for Lady Fenchurch. She made herself necessary to him, used him as a friend, adviser, and companion, and flattered his tastes and vanity. "He is a wary bird," she said to herself once, glancing at her handsome bold features reflected in the chimney-glass, "but I think I am a match for him."

Mrs. Hardfast on these occasions found

endless work in her household occupations, and gracefully apologised for leaving the young people alone. Her absence was a boon to Dick, who was learning to appreciate the pleasant dallying with a pretty woman, and a machinery of companionship so carefully adjusted that not a jar or a hitch came to break the agreeable and even monotony. He was aimless and objectless, and shrank nervously from going to his grandmother's, where he was now long overdue; while Maud, working on this reluctance, took every opportunity of impressing on him that in society alone, and in her society above all, could be found real satisfaction. One day Mrs. Hardfast, who possessed an only son, a spoiled boy of about eleven, consulted Dick, now installed as the intimate friend of the family, about his education. She had heard of a classical tutor, an Oxford man, highly recommended, whose terms were moderate, and she wondered if Dick would really be so kind as to go and see him. Dick, now in a mood of universal obligingness, promised, and set out for the address given. After a lengthy drive he knocked at a small house standing in a pretty little garden in the

outskirts of London. The door was opened to him by a lady.

“Is Mr. Bruce at home?” he asked, doubtfully.

“Oh, yes,” said the lady, with a toss of her head, and a glance of approval at Dick’s appearance. “Pray step in here.”

Dick, believing her to be the tutor’s wife, marvelled at his choice. “Mrs. Bruce, I presume?” he said.

“Oh dear no!” laughed the lively little lady, her big black eyes sparkling, and her parted lips displaying an even row of white teeth. “Mr. Bruce is a bachelor, and *I* am his landlady, Mrs. Flinks.”

“Indeed! and a very charming one, Mrs. Flinks,” responded Dick, gallantly.

“Single gentlemen are easy to please,” said the landlady, reflectively, posing her head on one side in the attitude of a young person on the lid of a French plum-box, “though to be sure I never was brought up to let lodgings, and it does go against the grain; my poor pa would never have believed I should come to this—but there, you want to see Mr. Bruce—a college friend I presume

—and of course my blighted life is of no moment to you.”

“Your conversation is most attractive, but you see I have business with Mr. Bruce.”

“Exactly so, I will acquaint him with it at once,” said the landlady, seductively sailing from the room. Much amused at the strange little creature’s ways, Dick glanced around. The room, evidently the landlady’s own, was nicely furnished with chairs and sofa covered in green reps, a canary in a bright brass cage hung in the window between the snowy muslin curtains, a print of the Emperor Napoleon in historically martial attitude scowled from the wall, and on the tables were scattered photographs in plush frames of simpering ladies and gentlemen. In one corner stood a piano, and on the music stool, with its pages open, lay the score of Madame Angôt set to English words. After a few moments the landlady returned, bridling and laughing, and proceeded to escort her visitor upstairs, where, after throwing open the door of the first-floor sitting-room with a dramatic flourish, she at last consented to leave the two men alone.

“ Julian ! ” “ Dick ! ” burst simultaneously from their lips as they shook one another heartily by the hand. “ Who would have thought of finding you here, old fellow ? ”

“ How did you track me out ? and how well and — yes, manly you are looking, Dick.” Mr. Bruce drew forward a chair, and a faint flush of pleasure rose on his pallid cheek. Julian and Dick were old school-fellows, they had messed, worked, and consorted together. Dick, famous in the cricket and playing fields, was a tyro at his books, and with these Julian was ever ready to help and advise. The two boys parted when they left school, Dick went to Cambridge and Julian to Oxford, and only met occasionally. Dick hunted and boated and spent money, Julian, as before, worked hard, and owing his education to the savings of a widowed mother, felt no temptation to spend, but preferred honours to sporting notoriety. Thus they drifted apart, their paths in life diverging ever, and for the last two years had completely lost sight of one another, though each still retained an affection for the playmate of his youth. They were a

contrast physically as well as morally. Dick was well-knit, large of limb, fair and ruddy ; athletics had developed his figure and given him ease and grace of carriage. His bright clear eyes, undimmed by care or work, looked fearlessly out from beneath the broad low forehead, while the curves of his full mobile lips, hidden under the small moustache, and the keen delicate nostrils denoted an emotional and impulsive temperament. Julian's height was above the average; his reedy, lank figure, bowed by study, looked shrunken in the loosely-fitting old grey coat he wore ; his hands, which in conversation he had a trick of knotting together nervously, were thin and delicate as a woman's ; his hair, fair and colourless, thrown back from an exceptionally high white forehead, hung straight and limp ; his eyes, of a cool grey tint, had a dim absent expression, the expression of a thinker rather than a man of action ; but the delicacy and feminine softness of his appearance was effectually contradicted by the large square chin and well chiselled expressive mouth. His strength of endurance was great, his capacity for work immense. Dick's power, on the con-

trary, consisted in passionate energy, though the energy, as a rule, lay dormant and could be called out only by exceptional and serious circumstances.

The young student looked with pleasure at his friend. His life was dull and lonely, but beneath his calm exterior beat a warm and tender heart. Dick, on his part, at sight of him, recalled the happy days of boyhood, when to be captain of the boats meant glory, and in the difficulties of Latin verse consisted life's greatest misery. In those days Dick had unconsciously deferred to Julian, feeling the real superiority of determination and pluck hidden under the shy reserve of the quiet retiring boy. He had lived with other men since, had been flattered and made up to, and influenced, but he had never known what it was to lean implicitly on the stay of true and disinterested friendship since the hour he parted from Julian.

“Why, Julian, old fellow! how is it you've come down to this? Surely *you* are not going in for the horrible drudgery of a boy's tutor?”

“Why not? Is it not the work of a

philosopher to be, as Addison says, ‘every day subduing his passions and laying aside his prejudices?’ If prejudices prevent my working for my bread, the sooner I divest myself of them the better.”

“ You are the same as ever, I see.”

“ Perhaps, not quite though; can we ever stand still?”

“ Well, I call it frittering away your faculties to try and teach dull boys. By Jove! I hope for your sake, Julian, they will be brighter at their books than I was.”

“ I confess it is the occupation of necessity not of choice. I am working at a ‘magnum opus,’ my dear Dick, a work which, I trust, will revolutionise the whole province of history, but like most good and great undertakings it will not pay, and to live (even the student requires some kind of food) I must take what I can find, and learn to be content with little; hence the descent, as you are pleased to consider it, to teaching.”

“ Can I help you? It does not seem fair that your abilities should be wasted thus. I have a good allowance myself, and there’s

granny, I am sure she would let me help you."

"Thanks, Dick. There is no one in the world to whom I would so willingly be indebted as yourself, but I cannot do this. The moment a man accepts aid, he is ruined; his genius is fettered, his work becomes indifferent, and self-reliance, that invaluable quality, leaves him."

"Nonsense, Julian! of some men that might be true, but not of *you* and with *me*."

Julian shook his head.

"I cannot tell, but I dare not test it. I have made two rules for my conduct in life which I am determined not to break. 'Be honest with yourself,' and 'Be under money obligations to no man.' Let us talk of something else; what have you been doing?"

"Nothing; I don't wish to do anything," said Dick sadly; "I want to live my life as I like, and hurt nobody, but they won't let one alone to do so, and if one cares for anything it is sure to go wrong. Life is a gigantic mistake."

"Yes, life *is* a mistake," answered Julian, a rapt expression coming into his

grey eyes, “ and, because it is a tangle, the best of us here below, the strongest and the wisest, set to work to unravel it. The Minotaur’s labyrinth is no myth, but it needs a hero to find the clue. What troubles you, Dick ? you look honest and unspoiled ; you cannot be hampered for money ; what is it ? tell me.”

“ I suppose it’s the everlasting story—a woman.”

“ Ah ! ” said Julian, “ then it’s serious.”

Characteristically, though this young man had never known any woman intimately, except his mother, a loving simple soul, he believed implicitly in love as an overmastering passion. Dick, with very little persuasion, unburdened himself (he knew the secret fastnesses of his friend’s heart), and told of his mad, passionate, hopeless love, which had come and grown and withered like the gourd of scripture.

“ The experience has been sharp,” said Julian, when he had finished ; “ but perhaps salutary. You musn’t sit down and moan ; let it make a man of you. That woman’s picture in your heart may keep you always from harm, she is sacred to you now.”

“Yes” sighed Dick “she will not see me again.”

“All honour to her. She has suffered, I have no doubt, suffered doubly from her weakness and apparent treachery. *There's* the sting, Dick, in the treachery ; but the struggle is over now, and you are young and have your life before you still.”

At this juncture the irrepressible landlady appeared bearing the tea-tray, which she placed on the table, much to Julian's annoyance brushing aside as she did so one of his most cherished manuscripts. “Shall I pour out the tea ?” she asked, pluming herself, “Pa always said I was the best tea-maker he knew and exactly understood the proper mixture of green tea. Green is good for the digestion, Mr. Bruce.” “Thank you, madam, I will pour out the tea myself.” Bruce politely bowed her away, and before the good lady had recovered from her astonishment she found herself alone in the passage outside. “Well, I never,” she muttered viciously, “*he* ain't a gentleman, though I do believe his friend was better mannered.” Thereupon she applied her ear to the key-hole in the hopes of hearing a remark about

herself. In this she was disappointed ; the two friends had reverted to politics. "I should like to see you in Parliament. Dick," said Julian, "there is your sphere ; not to become a place-hunter, a conscienceless official, or a mere party man, but to take your own line, to be independent, and act in the interests of the people—the people, Dick, who have made England. Let patriotism and courage be your watchwords, words almost forgotten in the strife of contending constituencies, yet words which can be your beacon and your reward. Must you be going ?" he added as Dick rose, "Good-bye, I trust we shall meet again soon ; never let a woman break your heart, Dick, not because of her *unworthiness*, but because of the *worthiness* which it must be *your* business to display."

The two friends then shook hands, Dick wending his way home more cheerfully and Julian placidly reverting to his books.

CHAPTER III.

MAUD waited in vain for her cousin that day. In vain she donned an attire of cerulean blue, supposed to be especially bewitching, and fit to ravish a man's eyes; no man came to be ravished and delighted. Maud sat at the window as the afternoon waned, gradually growing crosser and crosser. "You had better take off that gown" called Mrs. Hardfast from her armchair, "he won't come now, and that gown is your best, and vastly too good to be crumpled up as you are doing."

"Oh mamma, don't worry, please," said the girl pettishly..

"I should like to know what would happen to you if I did not worry," said her mother, placidly, "if I had not slaved to make both ends meet and given all my mind to it, you couldn't be turned out as you are

—fresh dresses, Paris make, fit for a duchess's daughter. It is a comfort I am accustomed to ingratitude."

"I'm not ungrateful," Maud sighed, "but really, it is too hot to argue."

"I wonder who would have children if one only knew beforehand what trouble and annoyance they entail," continued Mrs. Hardfast. "Maud, it's my belief you will never marry Dick. He means nothing, and is only dangling after you because he has not anything better to do."

Mrs. Hardfast had a peculiarly cutting way of uttering home-truths in a quiet voice, which was extremely galling to the victim. Maud turned pale and bit her pretty lips with annoyance.

"I am not at all sure that the report we heard about Dick's falling in love with Lady Fenchurch was not true. Dick is too much of a gentleman to compromise a woman, but he is deep and sly. Did you notice that he never told us where he had been when he went abroad?"

"He said he had been to Rome."

"Yes, in an off-hand kind of way, but he did not stay there all the time. Where did he

spend that time? Men always talk about their doings unless they have something to hide. They like the sound of their own voices too well to be mute. Dick is hiding something from us, I'm sure."

"He is not bound to tell us everything," said Maud, revealing a shade more interest in the subject than she had previously showed.

"Certainly not. But *you* ought to find out everything about his movements, for you spend hours in his company," added her mother, meaningly.

"We do not always talk," said Maud crossly.

"What do you do, then, you don't make love, I know; do you go to sleep? Really, Maud, considering all the pains I have taken to bring you up, and the advantages you have had, you are a perfect fool."

Maud smiled a little, a bitter sarcastic smile.

"What visits shall we pay this autumn?" pursued Mrs. Hardfast reflectively; "Let me see, this is the end of September, everyone has returned from the seaside or foreign baths; I'm glad we saved our money and

did not go there, for a campaign in country houses is your best chance now; you play tennis splendidly, and your figure can stand those flannel gowns which are so dreadfully unbecoming. You mustn't get any stouter though, my dear, your bust is quite full enough, and at your age stoutness detracts from a youthful appearance."

"My age!" said Maud.

"Yes, your age; we needn't stand on ceremony and pretend to fine feelings when we are alone; let me tell you you're four and twenty; getting on, my dear, getting on! Now what invitations have you picked up? Not many, I'm afraid; I hope your sun hasn't gone down yet; if so, you must marry a parson or a country squire."

"Providing of course I fail with Dick; why are you taking it for granted?"

"I won't do that," said Mrs. Hardfast, looking admiringly at her daughter as she rose and walked across the room. "You are very graceful and dance to perfection; but I think we are out of luck. Lady Bobadil has married off her four ugly daughters, already."

"That's different, she gives parties."

Maud's ideal was not a high one; she was accustomed to attribute every action to a shabby motive, and the greater part of her friends' conduct to petty design. She knew no better, poor thing! Happiness to her meant a good settlement, and a nice person, one who was susceptible to her beauty. She loved her cousin according to her ability, but she would have married any rich man who came within her grasp. Such matter of fact minds are not the highest types, but they are very common in society, and if they are not exceptionally tested prove capable of sufficient attachment and ordinary amiability. Maud received her cousin next day with a little pleased air of surprise, and with feline subtlety cross-questioned him as her mother had advised. But Dick was either obtuse or clever; he parried her attacks skilfully and she discovered nothing. While they were talking, another visitor was announced. This was the reserve arrow Maud had privately kept to herself in case of failure with her cousin, and perhaps as an additional weapon should Dick prove recalcitrant. Arthur Sterney was an ensign in the Guards, addicted to tight clothes, gaudy

ties, high collars, large cigars, late hours, and full-blown women. He admired Maud extremely, but it argued for the desperation of her ambition to have fixed her choice upon him, for, though entitled to a sufficient inheritance at his father's death, he had already disposed of the major part at exorbitant interest to various obliging money-lenders.

“ My cousin, Mr. Carrol ! ” said Maud, with a wave of her hand.

“ Oh ! aw ! very happy to make your acquaintance I’m sure ! ” he said, after a pause.

“ Dick has just returned from abroad,” she explained, to cover the awkward silence.

“ Oh ! aw ! Paris I suppose ? Wish I could get away too ; they will keep me stewing at Aldershot ; 'pon my word we are as hard worked as navvies ; what’s the use of being a gentleman if you’re to work like a nigger ? Are you in the army, Mr. Carrol ? ”

Dick explained that he was a free man, consequently a happy one, and Mr. Sterney forthwith aired his grievances. He told how his maternal great-uncle owned the

best moor in Scotland, and how he had been prevented by the unsympathetic authorities from shooting so much as a brace of grouse. “It’s all the fault of the radicals; they won’t understand that a gentleman is accustomed to certain things, and can’t exist without ‘em.”

Dick hereupon smothered a yawn, and Maud deftly turned the conversation into the channel of theatres. Young Sterney was equally at home on this subject.

“Seen little Sally?” he asked accommodatingly; “oh! she’s capital; a Yankee, you know, keeps you in fits of laughter, and dances like a tennis ball -- beats the English girls to nothing. I went last night, and I’m going to-morrow. I’ve taken a stall for the season. You really ought to come, Miss Hardfast, do! I’ll get a box and give you some supper at the Orleans afterwards. The fellows in my regiment are mad about her.”

“Thanks,” said Maud, demurely, “I will see if we can manage it.” She had no objection to showing Dick how anxious other young men were for her company, and how desirous to minister to her pleasures. Dick

certainly displayed the most complete indifference ; he expressed a friendly interest in the theatrical performance, neither offering his escort, nor objecting to that of the young ensign. However, she had her revenge, for when Mr. Sterney had departed, making his exit in as wooden and imperturbable a manner as he had effected his entrance, Dick settled himself more comfortably, and, encouraged by her sympathy, began to unfold to her some of his ideas :—

“ I met an old school-friend yesterday, and he has advised me to get something to do. You see it’s a bore, being an idle man — ? ”

“ Yes,” responded Maud, thinking that if he were once married she would give him plenty of occupation in escorting her to balls and parties.

“ He advises Parliament. I don’t know much about it, but I suppose one can learn ; there are fellows who coach you up for everything, politics and such like.”

“ Of course, and you are so clever.”

“ I don’t think I am clever, but I have some

common sense, and I daresay I could get up an interest in anything."

"Have you any place in view? How I should like to canvass for you!"

Her cheeks glowed and her eyes spoke volumes of sympathy.

"I shall write to Granny to ask if she has any objection. I must you know, for the form of the thing, and I mean to go down there in a day or two to talk over matters, she has been expecting me some time already."

"What do you think she will say?"

"Nothing much, but I suppose Uncle Vincent and his wife will make themselves disagreeable, however, I can generally manage granny. What are your plans, you are not going to stay on here, are you?"

"Oh, no!" Maud poised her pretty head reflectively, "we intend to pay a number of country visits, perhaps we shall meet, who knows?"

"I hope we shall," he said heartily.

Maud had acquired the information she sought. That same afternoon she dashed off a note to Lady Eleanor Highview whose house, though in the neighbouring county,

was not far distant from the abode of Dick's grandmother. Once there, Maud would manage the remainder, contrive to see him by hook or by crook, deepen the impression she had made upon him, increase her influence, finally carry him off captive. Politics were a nice safety-valve, and anything was better for her purpose than the society of other women.

Maud then proceeded to her dressmaker's, where she ordered one or two pretty walking-dresses and some new hats, promising to send a cheque shortly for the amount of last year's account—had she not incurred fresh expense she would long since have been pressed for it,—and calmly sat down to await the answer to her letter. It came in a few days. Lady Eleanor said she would be delighted to see Maud and her mother, and thought it kind of them to have taken her at her word, and interpreted the general invitation given in the season into a special one. No doubt some young people would be staying with her, and Maud must prepare herself for tennis and balls. Maud's eyes sparkled as she read the cordial letter.

“ There, mamma ! you see I was not

mistaken, my sun has not gone down yet, for Lady Eleanor never invites people who are not good-looking, agreeable, or useful. I am not useful, for I have no money and no interest, consequently I must be good-looking."

Mrs. Hardfast smiled, and immediately proceeded to discharge her cook, and to screw the housemaid down to the lowest possible figure of board wages, on the plea that, with rents unpaid and Christmas presents in prospect, she could not afford more. Mrs. Hardfast's Christmas presents to her servants consisted of an old gown which could be of no possible use to her, and of the winter number of some goody picture paper. The housemaid was a new arrival, however, and, imagining the Christmas presents to mean a crisp bank-note, consented, after a little demurring, to the board wages proposed.

"And now, Maud," cried Mrs. Hardfast, having settled these agreeable preliminaries, "I am ready to start whenever you like."

CHAPTER IV.

IT was about this time, that one evening Sir Hilary Fenchurch imparted a piece of news to his wife and sister. Returning from the county town he met the family lawyer, Mr. Dewsnap, who received it straight from Mr. Marall the member's own lips, that he had decided to retire from Parliament, and agreed to ask Sir Hilary to be his substitute in the event of a vacancy for the county, in which case there might possibly be a contest. Hitherto a quiet and undisputed Tory seat, some dashing young Liberal might take it into his head to come down and make a forlorn trial to regain it.

“They wish you to stand?” said Miss Fenchurch.

“Yes.” Sir Hilary hesitated a little.

“Dewsnap thinks I have a very good chance.”

“Oh ! Hilary, pray accept and take your rightful position.”

“To be sure, Mr. Marall’s property was never as large as mine, and my farms are all in first-rate condition, while his, I am told, are shockingly out of repair, and there is not a good gate on his estate ; but then times are changed, and what did very well twenty years ago won’t do now, and then, with the ballot and the impossibility of bribing, it is hard to say who has a chance.”

“I have heard that the ballot is really a gain to the Conservative party,” put in Evelyn.

“Nonsense ! the only use of the ballot is to help those who haven’t the courage of their opinions. Really, now I think of it, I do believe I’m fairly popular, hunting-men generally agree with the farmers, they’re glad of the chance of getting compensation for the chickens, and finding a market for their young horses. I’ll ride over to West Thorpe to-morrow and consult Dewsnap. There’s one thing to be said ; if I do stand, the people will have a real good staunch Conservative

to represent them, and a man who will exert himself in the cause of his party. That poor Marall was gouty, and couldn't speak ; he let everything go by default ; I shan't do that. There's education now, those infernal Board Schools, that cost something shameful ! I've no patience with the way they cocker up the children of the poor, giving them all kinds of ridiculous learning ; much better give them boots ; the proper education of a labouring man is, in the words of the Catechism, to 'learn to labour truly, and to do his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call him.' Every man wishes to change his state of life ; which must lead to discontent and unsettle the mind."

"Indeed, you're right, Hilary ; it is quite impossible to get a good servant now," said Miss Fenchurch peevishly. "That house-maid of yours, Evelyn, with the fringe of fair hair, looks more like an actress than a decent respectable servant. I caught her in the passage the other day, reading a novel, which she hid away when she saw me, with an insolent giggle."

"True," said Sir Hilary "it is deplorable ;"

then turning to his wife he said, “you must canvass for me, Evelyn, and on such an occasion we had better waive all fear of infectious diseases and visit the cottages together.”

“Be sure to put some camphor in your dress,” said Miss Fenchurch warningly.

“I shall be glad to help you.” Lady Fenchurch’s voice rang so gaily that her sister-in-law stared at her in amazement. “And you will persuade the Government to improve the poor people’s houses, won’t you? and I will bribe the electors with pretty speeches.”

Sir Hilary did not answer; it was hardly so much with the idea of improving the condition of the helpless as of increasing his own popularity and influence that he decided to come forward as a candidate for Parliamentary honours. Such motives are unfortunately extremely common in the political world and nobody thinks the worse of a man in consequence.

On the following morning Sir Hilary mounted his grey cob and rode along the autumnal tinted lanes to West Thorpe. He had lighted a cigar and was thinking deeply.

Actuated by a keen sense of propriety in contradiction to eccentricity, and knowing that certain things were expected of him, he determined that society should not be disappointed. Sir Hilary belonged to the old school of Tories, who cherish the comfortable conviction that Britons never will be slaves and that the Englishman is the finest fellow in the world. He considered the duties of an M.P. to be comprised in voting steadily with his party, presiding at agricultural dinners, and giving away prizes to Volunteers. Needless to say he was oppressed by no deep sense of moral responsibility, consequently his meditations were caused solely by the problem of the cost of elections. For Sir Hilary, though tolerably open-handed, was like all good men of business, averse to spending money uselessly. He ran over in his mind the chances of a rival candidate, with the speculation as to who that rival might be. West Thorpe, though a market and county town, was a sleepy place. Trade had dwindled and the progress made was in a retrograde direction. The town itself consisted of a number of narrow twisting streets converging on the market-place, and running

away into various intricate offshoots of small courts and alleys. The variety of size and shape of the houses, which were some square and red brick, some white with gabled windows and starred with black beams, some big, some little, some thatched, some slated, clustering up and down from the river-side to the elevation of the market-place, rendered the town a very picturesque object. Artists came to paint and photographers to photograph it, while the church itself, an ancient building whose spire was nearly on a level with the market-place, formed the legitimate pride of the inhabitants. Yet, as it was gradually falling into ruin, and the restoration begun in the last few years had never been completed, owing to the want of funds and the lack of any great local magnate to cherish the undertaking, it seemed probable that decay would soon overtake and smother the restorations. The church remained in the position of a beauty with a patch over one eye, or of a picture by some great artist upon which a mischievous school-boy has daubed a splash of whitewash.

As you entered the main street there stood facing you a massive square red brick house

with a large brass knocker and a porch overshadowed by a handsome magnolia tree. This was the lawyer's house, and here Sir Hilary stopped, rang the bell loudly, and asked for Mr. Dewsnap, leaving his pony in the care of the page-boy, who owned an immense admiration for the sleek and well-fed animal, and showed it obligingly by tickling him under his stomach to see if he would kick, and poking him in the ribs as a proof of familiar affection. When on the return journey the cob snorted and jumped about, his unconscious owner merely attributed this to high spirits and to a lack of patience common to both women and horses. Mr. Dewsnap was elderly and had a thick head of iron-grey hair; his little light eyes were sharp and shrewd; his lips thin and firmly compressed, though a sarcastic smile occasionally played about them when in company of his clients, which caused the latter to feel uncomfortable and to fear rather than love him. He had studied the worst side of nature in his profession, and invariably looked to self-interest as the motive of conduct, and mistrusted all those who talked of principles and honour; yet in

ordinary life he was a kind-hearted man, a good husband and a good father, and his word could be implicitly relied upon, so that he grew to be regarded as an oracle of cleverness and wisdom. Sir Hilary esteemed him highly. Sentiment in matters of business he considered out of place, and, when the lawyer had once ventured to remark to him on the folly of an old man taking a young wife, Sir Hilary had been mortally offended. It was some months before he forgave him, but now, in a moment of difficulty and excitement, he instinctively turned to him for advice. Mr. Dewsnap settled his spectacles carefully on his nose as Sir Hilary entered and prepared to greet his client. The spectacles were unnecessary, for Mr. Dewsnap's eyesight was excellent, but they served him as a shield and an excuse when dealing with difficult or slippery people. Sir Hilary dropped at once into the large leather armchair that stood with its face towards the light and began:—

“ Well, Dewsnap, I've made up my mind to stand.”

“ A very wise resolution, I'm sure, Sir Hilary, and the county ought to return

you if it looked to its own interests; but I hear there is to be a contest, the Liberals mean to bring forward a candidate."

"I don't see who is to come forward," said Sir Hilary, perplexed; "old Marall has no relations, Lord Dilbury is abroad, I can't think of any one."

"You've forgotten one important person."

"Who is that? There is none but Highview; he would not care for it."

"Perhaps not, but you've been in love though, Sir Hilary, and you're a married man; have you never found yourself doing something you had not intended at your wife's instigation?"

"Never!"

"Then you're exceptionally fortunate; in my profession I constantly see the most independent men the most influenced by their families. Lady Eleanor is a very remarkable person, I have had several proofs of it. I can fancy that she might wish her husband to be an M.P., or rather that she wishes to return an M.P., either her husband or another."

"To whom do you refer?"

"To Mr. Dick Carrol. She has decided

upon him, I believe; he's young and good-looking, and would make an easy puppet in her hands."

"What! you mean Mrs. Carrol's grandson?"

"Yes, her heir. She can't live very long; she is an old lady, and then the fine place of Long Leam will be his."

"But she is not exactly one of the county people?"

"No, but she owns some property here; her grandson would have a good chance."

"It will be a fight, Dewsnap?"

"Yes, it will be a fight: you are not alarmed?"

"No, oh dear no! I'll fight to the last, though it will be expensive. I've no idea of a stuck-up young jackanapes from a neighbouring county ousting me from my proper position. I'll spare neither trouble or expense to beat him."

"It will depend greatly on the ladies. Lady Eleanor *versus* Lady Fenchurch. The former is a seasoned old soldier but the latter has youth and beauty on her side. It is still possible to bribe with kind looks

and pretty words, Sir Hilary, and if we do win, why it will be all the greater triumph."

"How much will it cost?" said Sir Hilary, after a pause; "not that money is any object, none whatever. I have been a thrifty man all my life, and I have savings."

"It may be a matter of five or six thousand; you must get Camps as your agent; he is the best; he is up to all the dodges and will keep you strictly within the law. See him to-day, if you can, and lose no time about it; he is in the town at this moment, I happen to know."

"Very well, I'll try to find him at once." Sir Hilary buttoned his coat; "Give me a glass of your old Madeira first, and I'll be off."

Mr. Dewsnap supplied the Madeira and watched Sir Hilary ride down the street.

"He looks gloomy, I should say a man with whom marriage hasn't agreed particularly," thought the shrewd lawyer to himself as he replaced the wine in the cupboard.

CHAPTER V.

WE left Dick meditating on the advantages to be derived from a parliamentary career, and somewhat inclined to adopt it. He possessed a certain amount of talent, which, however, had hitherto lain dormant, but, thanks to Julian's advice, it seemed probable that he might yet cut a figure. The abrupt termination of his love affair in some measure assisted this, for he was sore and angry at heart, and ready to plunge into any form of excitement that presented itself. A few days later he was to be found again in Julian's little parlour, drinking in his friend's wisdom, and resting himself in the calm and rational atmosphere of study. Mrs. Flinks, on her part, who appreciated the unworldliness of her lodger, even while she felt inclined to despise him for it,

viewed Dick's coming with much interest. Julian's extreme imperviousness to her coquettish ways exasperated her occasionally, and the fact that she might be wearing her most becoming mob-cap, or her best-fitting gown, without even causing him to lift his head from the big folio in which he was immersed, would have tried a saint's patience. But then in return he was so quiet, so unassuming, so uncomplaining, that if his fire were let out, or the hot water proved to be tepid, or the sugar unexpectedly exhausted, it was all the same to him, he never murmured. In fact he was so remarkably childish and unsophisticated, in subtle Mrs. Flinks's opinion, that she put him down as somewhat weak in mind. That was certainly not the case with the nice bright-looking young gentleman, his friend. There was nothing weak about *him*. The two men were in Julian's little untidy room, littered with books and papers; Dick seated in the only arm-chair, Julian himself at the table, jotting down notes on a bit of paper.

“In another year or two,” he was saying, “I shall have finished my History, the

history of the social development of England : it is the kind of history we want now, not a dry abstract of wars and intrigues, but the story of the life of the people, the record of their faith, their language, their social habits.” Julian sighed a little ; his mild eyes bore a wearied expression.

“ You’re tired, old fellow,” said Dick, taking the cigar out of his mouth. Julian contented himself with a clay pipe, but his friend had more fastidious tastes. “ Why do you work yourself to death like this ? what’s the use of it ? If *you* don’t find out all these things, some other fellow will -- an empty place is filled up directly.”

“ Don’t say that, Dick,” Julian’s tone was pained. “ That’s the fiendish voice that haunts me sometimes, when I’m alone and weary, and whispers to me that there is nothing worth, nothing true, nothing right ; that I’ve slaved and toiled for nothing, and that there is no reward—none. That we must just grope and wonder, and—die. But it isn’t true, I tell you it isn’t ; work is its own reward, and good work is the divine seed sown by feeble human hands.”

“Probably ; but you’re morbid, Julian. Come away to the country with me, to the green fields, and the tennis, and the birds, and the garden ;” he hesitated, not being used to sentimental descriptions ; “you’d enjoy it—take a holiday.”

“There is no good work to be done in spurts ; I must persevere. I am putting the very best of myself into this book ; and if afterwards I break down—well, when a man has done his duty he must not count the cost.”

“Ridiculous creature ! Why not be practical and help me ? I’m one of the people ! take an interest in my social development. You talked to me about political life the last time I was here ; well, since then, I’ve been offered a seat in Parliament.”

“Indeed, tell me about it.”

“A distant sort of connection of mine, a Mr. Highview, has written to propose I should stand for the county ; the old member is about to retire and they think the seat can be won by a Liberal.”

“Of course—a Liberal—a social reformer, Dick.”

“I’d better reform *myself* first, I think, I don’t know or care a fig about reforms.”

“That will come,” said Julian, confidently.

“There will be a contest; I shall rather like that—the excitement will be as good as a campaign—(ah, why didn’t granny let me be a soldier?) I’m fond of fighting, and my opponent will be some respectable old Tory nonentity, I suppose—Mr. Highview does not state who it is—but he seems pretty confident of my success.”

“Of course it depends upon your adversary—the agricultural interest is usually shortsighted and conservative—if your rival is a large landed proprietor you do not stand so good a chance.”

“Mr. Highview thinks well of it and so does Lady Eleanor, which is even more to the point; she rules him, you know, and whatever she undertakes I am confident she will succeed in.”

“That is right then, I have nothing to add, but to wish you well, Dick. Try to do yourself justice—a man has no business to sit down with hands folded, or plant cabbages, till he has earned the right to do so;

there is heroism even in giving the right vote according to your conviction."

"I don't feel like a hero," said Dick, stretching himself lazily, "I haven't a particle of ambition, and I don't care sufficiently about anything to make myself uncomfortable, certainly not for any abstract idea."

"You may in time, perhaps."

"There is another reason," Dick hesitated, "why I'm not sure if I ought to accept—you see, the lady I told you about lives in the county—I might be thrown into her society; I don't want to behave ill to her or to get into a bother."

"Have you any reason to believe that her husband will take any active part in the election?"

"None whatever, Mr. Highview does not mention him. He said no Tory candidate had been decided upon, and he is anxious for an early answer in order that I may be first in the field."

"Then decide to accept. You need not court the lady's society, and remember that your public duty is the engrossing one. When the first pang of hearing your name mentioned is over, she will learn to get

accustomed to it. Besides, possibly you exaggerate her feelings; she is married—why should she not love her husband?"

"It was a *mariage de convenance*."

"Even so—you must not give way to morbid feelings; all is over between you two now; do not let yourself dream of possibilities; shape your future without a thought of her—the only way to overcome weakness is to look a thing straight in the face without flinching—and grapple with your difficulties bravely. You forgive me for speaking out?"

"Certainly. I know, old fellow, no man could have a truer or a kinder friend than you, only, you see, I'm not a bit of a hero. If I accept this offer I shall make one condition, that you come down with me and help in my campaign."

"Much as I regret leaving my books," said Julian, warmly, "in this case I cannot hesitate; you may command my services whenever you like."

Dick left his friend's lodging that day in a more contented frame of mind; fate had decided for him; he had nothing to do now but to float on the stream, and the sense of

a resolution taken seemed to lift a cloud of difficulty from his mind; yet he was still too much engrossed even to regard Mrs. Flinks's eager invitation to step into her parlour as he went out. The little woman watched him leave the house with mingled anger and disappointment, then flounced downstairs to her kitchen, where the elderly maid-of-all-work stood with bare red arms washing up her dishes.

“He’s gone again, Eves, without so much as a word, and I in my new cherry ribbons. It’s my belief that that pale, mean-spirited Cripps, who gets his bread by scribbling, and hasn’t a thought beyond steel pens and watery ink, put him up to slighting me. If my dear Pa were still alive wouldn’t he just give him a bit of his mind.”

“Lor, bless you, Mum,” answered Eves, without turning her head, “if I was you I’d give up hankering after fine gentlemen that ain’t worth the butcher’s meat they consume, and take a honest tradesman who could live in a villa, and keep a gig to save yer feet getting wet o’ Sundays.”

Mrs. Flinks, accustomed to the old woman’s

homely advice, shrugged her shoulders, and threw herself pettishly into a chair.

Eves, still at her washing, continued :

“And then when ye’re married there comes a heap of children to worrit yer. Who would be so anxious to have a family, I wonder? Childern, when they’re young, are a armful; but when they’re bigger they’re a heartful, and my sakes, that’s just worse.”

Dick, unconscious of the storm brewing behind him, pursued his way quietly to the Hardfasts’ house. Maud was at home, looking very handsome in dark blue cashmere. She had a useful knack of being always in the fashion, and yet never appearing over-dressed or eccentric.

“I am so glad you came,” she said, sweetly. “Mamma is out, and, as in her absence I can never receive visitors except you (you, of course, are a relation), I should have felt very dull all the afternoon.”

“Then you only care for somebody to call; you are not particular as to who it is?”

“Dick! Don’t be an idiot. I’m *always* pleased to see you, only I don’t always say so; it might seem like flattery.”

“I’m glad of that,” said Dick, edging his chair a little nearer, “for I want to consult you about a *very* important matter, on which I wish your advice.”

Maud’s heart gave a flutter—could the momentous words be spoken now what an amount of worry and trouble would be saved, and everything satisfactorily arranged.

“We’ve always been good friends, Maud, haven’t we?”

“Always,” she answered, sweetly.

“Ever since the days we stole cherries off the garden wall, and hid under the water-butt to escape the gardener—and I have always had such an opinion of your cleverness that now I am going to take a very important step, I cannot do so unless you give it your sanction.”

Maud listened impatiently, a rosy flush mantling her cheek. It seemed quite unnecessary to make all these preliminary speeches. What cared she about childhood and cherries, sorry reminders of long years of backboards and dreary lesson-learning? It need not prove so very difficult to ask a girl to be your wife, and seal the bargain with a

kiss. How provoking, to be sure, to be a woman, and have to sit still and look unconscious, and not dare to help out the stammered and bungling confession, but on the contrary pretend to a pleased surprise and agitation, emotions which she could only feel on the score of her mother's premature return before the irrevocable words had been spoken!

“Do you know Mr. Highview?” asked Dick.

Maud stared.

“Of course I do!”

What in the world had this beginning to do with the proposal Dick was about to make? She supposed it must be attributed to nervousness, and a habit of procrastination, and she rather snappishly continued:

“He was poor dear papa’s friend.”

“Ah! I had forgotten.”

Dick paused again, and Maud began to beat the carpet with her shoe; she could not help it, these wanderings from the beaten path of love seemed so very unnecessary.

“He has asked me to stand for the county, and do the canvassing from his place, which is more convenient than granny’s for the

purpose. I am rather tempted. An election must be exciting—almost as good as fox-hunting. Of course I'm not clever, and I don't much care about it; but I think I should cut a very tolerable figure, don't you, Maud?"

Maud was occupied dissembling her rage. To have her expectations raised, her feelings so cruelly trampled upon, was too bad. Dick was perfectly brutal—heartless. She made a superhuman effort, however; the happy moment might only be deferred, not lost for ever. "Yes, dear Dick, you know I think you *very* clever; it will be an excellent thing, and as you say quite an excitement; besides perhaps I can help you a tiny bit, for *we* are going to stay with the Highviews too; how fortunate, isn't it, and how I shall hail all your achievements, and listen greedily to your first speech! I shall make mamma often take me to the House of Commons, and try to secure a front place in the ladies' gallery among all the old women who suck peppermint lozenges, and discuss the merits of the speakers during the debates."

"Would you indeed do this?" cried Dick,

seizing her hand, “ what a good woman you are to be sure, Maud ! I never half appreciated you till this moment—you really approve and you really advise me to try ? It wouldn’t do for a fellow to fail, you know, if he did try, and make an ass of himself. I was half afraid you would discourage me and ——”

“ And why, pray ? ” she inquired, looking up at him languidly through her expressive, half-closed eyes ; “ whatever promotes your happiness gives *me* happiness too —— ”

Here was an opening for a man whose heart was given to the pretty girl sitting beside him, and glowing with gentle interest and devoted sympathy. But Dick’s mind was not running on love, he only cared for Maud’s approval, because, like the rest of us, he preferred his decision to be strengthened by the approval of his friends. He certainly thought it a little remarkable that a young and goodlooking girl should show such interest in politics, but in these days of female education and advanced views on all subjects one need be surprised at nothing.

“ I’ll write to Highview to-night,” he said, quietly, “ and accept. He will want me to

go down there at once, I expect. Granny will have to wait again—poor old dear ! She won't mind—she's used to it."

"We shall be at Highview Castle together, I hope," said Maud, "it is such a nice place, and Lady Eleanor is so kind—but you musn't fall in love with Luce."

"Who is Luce? and why should I fall in love with her?" asked Dick, absently.

"She is Lady Eleanor's niece, and of course they will try to make up a match between you—she is a nice girl, but, unfortunately, very plain."

"Plain—is she?"

"Yes, thin and pale, and has dark colourless hair." Maud put her hand up innocently to her own glossy auburn locks.

"Plain or not, I shall have other things to think of, and I scarcely imagine Miss Luce will need to complain of my attentions."

"Don't you intend to speak to us poor ladies then, while you're in the house?" asked Maud, with a becoming pout of her full red lips.

"Oh, *you*, that's different." Maud was triumphant and consoled; the *you*, so de-

cidedly accentuated sounded sweet in her ears; he regarded her, then, as something apart and more precious than ordinary girls. After a little further desultory talk, a few more bewitching upward glances from Maud, a lingering pressure of his hand, and many hearty congratulations and good wishes, Dick departed. He was satisfied and reassured; no man is impervious to cleverly conveyed flattery and pleasant looks and allusions, unless he has reached middle age, and is very crabbed and very sourly inclined indeed. He wrote a gratified and nicely worded acceptance of Mr. Highview's proposal, and expressed himself as much pleased and honoured by the offer that had been made him, an offer for which he knew himself to be indebted to Mr. Highview's kind support. Lady Eleanor smiled and nodded her head approvingly when her husband handed her the letter at breakfast, saying, "Well, my dear, what do you think of that?"

"Think! why I never expected anything else; all young men are ambitious and easily flattered, unless they're fools, and from all I hear Dick Carrol is *not* a fool."

CHAPTER VI.

THE Highviews and the Fenchurchs were the two great rival houses in the county, for Lord Dilbury, who was a hypocondriacal old bachelor, lived abroad and had almost ceased to be regarded as an Englishman. He received his rents punctually enough through an agent's hands, but he never did anything for his tenants, nor took any part in county business or politics, and in fact to most people was only a name, and a very disagreeable name too, on the occasions when the hounds ran through his fine woods, and the huntsmen were suddenly pulled up by locked gates and high iron railings. Mr Marall, the late member, was a fox-hunting squire, illiterate, crusty, and devoted to sport. He neither knew nor cared how to make

and keep his position ; thus, while Sir Hilary Fenchurch remained unmarried, Lady Eleanor reigned alone as the great lady of the county. Now, however, with a new and pretty rival both in politics and society, circumstances were considerably altered, and the contest seemed likely to be a trial of moral strength on the part of the ladies, quite as much as a battle of wily popularity on the part of the men, and the general result appeared very doubtful. Sir Hilary was popular with the farmers ; he was a good landlord, quiet, but improving, and encouraged the breed of horses ; but he was pig-headed and narrow-minded.

Mr. Highview, on the contrary, was the friend of the artizans and manufacturers, inclined to be broad and tolerant, and, so long as a man's political opinions were honestly of the right pattern, cared little for his religious views. Lady Eleanor was *not* liked, though much feared and courted. A long tongue in the upper classes is as great a power as in the ranks of washer-women. Lady Eleanor had a command of language and a choice of admirable maxims which, as

a rule, left her opponents but little to answer. Yet, while a great many people distinctly hated, and a few sought her from motives of real affection, the majority distrusted her. It was felt that, whichever way her own interests inclined, in that direction her conduct would tend, and that consequently no positively consistent behaviour on her part could be looked for. She was handsome, clever, and when she pleased indubitably fascinating, so fascinating that once in her presence you could not help believing in her. Mr. Highview, himself, who had been fascinated in his early youth, believed in her still. He would bow to her whims and caprices and defend them with a tender care that was peculiarly touching, and drew forth sundry shrugs and compressions of lips from impartial friends.

French writers assert that love is only kept alive by continual stimulation of surprises and variety. Possibly this may have accounted for Lady Eleanor's empire over her husband, for none could predicate with ease in which direction her newest eccentricity might travel. Uncontradicted

and undaunted, she had sailed gaily down the stream of life until at fifty years of age she was still buxom and fair, and owned a pair of white and dazzling shoulders, which she was fond of displaying in the lowest of well-cut gowns. Her face was unruffled, remarkable in its freshness and absence of crows'-feet, yet her favourite figure of speech was to the effect that “her health must soon break down under the strain of constant worry and labour imposed upon her.” Just now her hobby was politics, and she certainly did give herself a great deal of trouble in the matter, but the trouble was self-sought and therefore scarcely worthy of commiseration.

But even Lady Eleanor was not perfectly happy; she had one skeleton in her cupboard, and to her it seemed the bitterest conceivable. She had no children. Mr. Highview’s niece Luce Windermere lived with them as an adopted daughter at his earnest request, for she was the only child of his dead sister, and dear to him accordingly. This was another trial to poor Lady Eleanor, who had all the trouble and responsibility of

a school-room without the pleasures of motherhood.

Lady Eleanor was strict, anxious, and kind in her way, but poor Luce's childhood was brightened by no maternal love. She enjoyed neither kisses, caresses, nor affectionate words; she never felt the touch of a fondly stroking hand with its witchery of subtle speechless sympathy, never saw eyes fill with tears or heard a tremble come into the voice, or saw a shade of mysterious sorrow pass over an anxious face, and pressed the lips put warm and close to hers in an evening benediction. If she knew the meaning of love it was in connection with her uncle. To him she brought her babyish tattle, the hundred pretty exacting ways of childhood, and, much as she shrank from her aunt's cold words, so much the more did she coil round her uncle the clinging tendrils of her loving heart. Luce was said to be plain, and certainly by the side of her handsome aunt she did look plain. The girl felt this want of beauty as a shortcoming, and mixed up with it a remorseful feeling that it was ingratitude on her part that prevented her from responding more fully to Lady Eleanor's

efforts on her behalf. Sad were the looks the poor child frequently threw in the mirror as she tried to accustom herself to her plainness, and wondered why nature, so bountiful to the aunt, had been so niggard to the niece. Perhaps the contrast made her seem even plainer than she really was, for she had a slim and graceful figure, and a pair of beautiful eyes enlivened her small pale face. Even Lady Eleanor confessed that Luce had beautiful eyes, large and soft and pleading, but then, as Lady Eleanor said, what was the use of them, when they were generally cast down, and veiled by the long dark lashes, only flashing and lightening when Luce was keen and interested, which in her aunt's presence occurred but seldom. They were such truthful eyes too, eyes full of transparent honesty and singleness, indeed their full glance thrown questioningly upon Lady Eleanor in some of her erratic moods proved disturbing to the proud lady's equanimity. For eyes *can* speak, and sometimes with a weight of directness and censure that words do not possess. As you looked, that is to say as an impartial observer, looked into Luce's eyes and caught the deep spiritual expression that lay in them you

forgot that her nose was too square, her mouth too large, her hair absolutely refusing to be crimped and twisted into any fashionable shape, brown and dull, too light to be rich in colour, too dark to be golden, that her manner was shy and constrained, her hands tiny and waxen, and her slim figure marred by a distinct and regrettable stoop. Luce was accustomed to say that it did not matter what she wore or how she looked, for nobody ever threw a glance at her when in company of her queen-like aunt, and that, instead of being named Light, she should have been christened Shadow, her principal mission being to serve as a foil to the radiancy of beauty beside her. Lady Eleanor's object just now, for she always *had* an object, was to marry Luce to Dick, having fixed upon him as an eligible *parti*, and a person whom she was likely to be able to retain as her nominee and dependant. She had not imparted these views to Mr. Highview, but merely informed him that Mr. Carrol was a promising young man who would do honour to the Liberal cause if he were once instructed in the right path.

Dick's civil little note had been duly received and Luce informed of his coming,

which nowise interested her. She was standing at this moment, as was her frequent habit, by the window dreaming. Her large sad eyes were fixed on the autumnal landscape, on the ruddy beech, and the yellow chestnut-trees, and the dark Scotch firs standing up straight against the cold grey sky ; here and there a lime-tree, already stripped of its leaves, showed only the bare and slender twigs and branches. Occasionally a golden leaf fluttered down and added itself to the damp and decaying heap which the gardener indefatigably and hopelessly swept together. It was a dreary day, a depressing day, and Luce, whose nature was essentially receptive and sensitive, felt it so. Just then her aunt's full cheerful voice disturbed her reverie.

“ Ah ! I thought I should find you here, Luce, dawdling about and doing nothing, as usual. Why don't you go for a constitutional at least, like other girls, and get a bit of colour into your cheeks ? you will never be anything but sallow at this rate.”

Luce coloured painfully ; it hurt her to be always reminded of bodily infirmities, the possession of which she remembered acutely.

“Did you want anything, aunt?” she faltered.

“Want anything! Did anyone ever see such a creature? she thinks no one has anything to do but to stare blankly out of window all day long, as she does herself! Have you forgotten that we shall have a house-full next week? and the Hardfasts and Mr. Carrol come to-day, and of course the housekeeper has chosen this opportunity to fall ill, and one of the best carriage-horses is lame, and your uncle, as usual, is perfectly placid, so that everything falls upon me, and I’m really not strong.”

“Can I do anything to help you?”

“I am sure I don’t know what you *can* do, you generally make a muddle of everything you touch. The last time you wrote the invitations you put the Countess of Ditchwater, forgetting that her husband is only a baron, and you presented my compliments to General Truro’s wife, who was a housemaid before he married her, and whom I certainly never meant to ask. I often say to myself what is to become of you some day, when I am dead and gone, if you should ever have a

house of your own to look after, not that that's likely."

"No, it isn't likely," said Luce calmly ; "then why should we talk about it ? I never mean to marry, and when you don't want to keep me you can send me away ; I shall not complain."

"Send you away, indeed, child ! that is just like the Highviews, isn't it ? why they have always been generous to a fault. I wonder what your uncle would say to such a speech."

"He would not like it, I am sure ; but indeed, aunt, if I am so troublesome why do you keep me here ? "

"Stuff, child !" said Lady Eleanor, pettishly, looking severely at Luce, who stood meekly, with hands folded before her. "I wish you wouldn't stoop so dreadfully ; I declare your figure is shocking ! Can't you hold up your head as I do ? "

Poor Luce's head drooped lower and lower, and two big tears gathered in her eyes.

"Crying ! I declare you are a regular baby ; nothing spoils the complexion like tears. Don't let your uncle see you with

red eyes, for goodness' sake, or he will think I have been tormenting you, and that you are miserable instead of being, as you really are, a spoilt useless girl. You needn't look like a martyr either when I speak to you for your good, as is my duty. And pray try to be civil to Mr. Carrol when he comes; I am told he is a charming young man, and, of course, at his grandmother's death he'll be immensely rich. If you lay yourself out to be agreeable, I don't really see why, after all, you may not have a house of your own, some day. He will take you in to dinner to-night, so do your best."

Luce coloured painfully. Such speeches were an utter desecration of marriage in her opinion, for she inclined to the idea that only similarity of tastes and mutual love, of which, alas, she was so ignorant, could give peace or sanctity to the union of the sexes.

Lady Eleanor, satisfied with her peroration, now rose and majestically left the room.

Luce felt more wretched and depressed than ever. She knew she was plain, she had already accepted the fact; yet surely beauty was not everything; might it not be

possible to possess qualities as valuable and virtues to compensate? An intuition of something higher swept her soul. To hear of heroism and goodness fired her with enthusiasm; to read fine poetry roused her; to listen to sweet music entranced her; the sight of nature soothed her. Why had she these capacities, these sensibilities, but to unfold and use them? Life could not be the poor mean thing her aunt suggested, or the sense of its emptiness would crush her at once. No! no! her truth and earnestness found a response in nature. It could not be, there was nothing useless in the universe.

She took down her hat and cloak from the peg where they hung, and went out carrying a basket on her arm. The autumnal wind caressed her boisterously, and painted her sallow cheeks a faint rose, so that she looked almost pretty as in the approach she met the fly containing Mrs. Hardfast and Maud, their maid, and a pile of luggage. Maud spied her at once, and jumped out to give her a hearty welcome, while Mrs. Hardfast called after her daughter—

“It is very damp and raw, Maud, do

take care, or you will catch cold and have a red nose at dinner."

"No! no!" cried Maud, bent on having her own way, and confident in the magnificence of her young strength and beauty to defy a blustering autumn day. "Never mind me, you drive on and get a rest before dinner; a walk will do me good." Then she twined her arm in that of Luce and asked her innumerable questions.

"Where are you going to, like an old market-woman, with that basket on your arm?"

"To visit some poor people. I have port wine and soup in the basket."

"Oh! I never visit poor people. I should hate to do so," said Maud, daintily tripping over the wet places in the road.

"I don't like it much either; but it's something to do, an object for a walk, and, besides, I really believe it gives them pleasure."

"You might find something else to occupy your time, I should think, something pleasanter. I always design a new dress whenever time hangs heavy on my hands."

“Dress bores me; my aunt thinks so much of it; I believe she fancies people are only pegs to hang clothes on.”

Maud laughed and shook the golden fringe out of her eyes. “It is very jolly being here, Luce, don’t look so doleful. I mean to enjoy myself. I’ve got a great many plans in my head, and you must help me with some of them. I can assure you I have a very busy time before me, and you are such an unworldly little creature that you can’t stand in my way. Do you know Mr. Carrol?”

“No,” said Luce, indifferently.

“Oh! Well, I intend to marry him.”

Luce looked at her a little surprised, and said quietly: “My aunt wants *me* to marry him too, but he’s sure not to look at me, that’s one comfort!”

Maud glanced eagerly at her friend to see if she were in earnest. Such supernatural indifference to her prospects surpassed her imagination, but if Luce spoke truth, and Maud really believed she did, Luce, at least, was a valuable and reliable ally.

“Then you will help me? what a funny girl you are to be sure, Luce!”

“ You wouldn’t think it funny if you lived my life—it isn’t pleasant to be overlooked by every man you meet and reproached for it afterwards. I wish I could go out as a governess.”

“ Nonsense ! you are a fool, Luce. I should be glad enough if I had a rich uncle who would let me live with him. *You* don’t know what it is to have to make both ends meet. Mamma works at the problem all the year round, and it’s the most difficult sum in creation ; just as you think you have got to the end of it, you find a slight omission or mistake in your calculations, and you have to begin all over again. I mean to marry naturally, but, rich or not rich, every girl is a fool who does not, when she gets a chance. I’ve never had a *real* good offer though yet, and of course one can’t make a bad bargain.”

“ I should never better myself,” said Luce, hopelessly ; “ I’m plain, and I can’t marry for money, and no one will ever care for me, just for myself ; it is no use Maud, thinking of it. If I married for money, I should simply loathe the man, and kill him, or myself, before the honeymoon was over.”

“ Fudge ! ” said Maud, sharply, “ Providence helps those that help themselves ; if you cast your eyes down and look glum whenever a man approaches you, of course you can’t expect him to find you bewitching. *I* always smile and appear delighted with every one, no matter how stupid he may be, and then *I* try to find out as quickly as *I* can what is his particular weakness and trade upon it ; flatter him up as much as possible ; it’s as easy as A B C when you know the way.”

“ For all that, Maud, you’re four-and-twenty, and not yet married.”

“ At least it is not the fault of my system, but I certainly have been unlucky ; it’s our horrid poverty that hinders me, and the awfully mean shifts we’re put to. However, this time I really intend to persevere, and not to fail. A country house is such a capital opportunity. Dear me ! what a dew there is rising ; we had better go in, I think. I shouldn’t at all like to catch a sore throat ; besides, I must change my gown for tea.”

“ You look very nice now,” cried Luce, simply.”

“ No, my hair’s out of curl, and this

travelling dress is shabby—ah, my dear, you don't half understand the importance of dress—it is everything when one wishes to captivate. Now, I'll just explain to you: you see blue suits me best, so I am constant to it; but it requires a perfect genius to improvise perpetual variety in harmony, and you would be surprised to hear of all the shades of blue I have discoverd; there's dark blue, and violet blue, and pansy blue, and Eton blue, and peacock blue, and electric blue, and cornflower blue, and—oh, ever so many more.”

“I had no idea dress was such a mystery. I don't think my aunt has made a study of it, she generally leaves it to her dressmaker, though she always buys a new dress for every *occasion*.”

“Dress comprises art, imagination, industry, perseverance,” glibly enumerated Maud. “Ingenuity, taste, tact, delicacy, why, there really isn't a good quality in the world that you can't use in your study of it, especially if you're not rich.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE Hardfasts, Dick Carrol, and a couple of neighbours comprised the present party, but the following week a large influx of neighbours was expected. Luce felt extremely indifferent to the company, and her only fear was lest Mr. Carrol should monopolise her uncle's whole time and attention, and interfere with her enjoyment of the usual afternoon ride with Mr. Highview.

Dick arrived at tea-time. Maud, newly decorated, passed accidentally through the hall at that instant and gave him the first greeting. This was fortunate, it took off the stiffness of his arrival as she sauntered into the library beside him chatting pleasantly; and made it clear that she was an old and a valued friend. The Castle was very handsome, entirely new, the furniture new, or recently bought, and the gardens newly laid out.

It had taxed Lady Eleanor's skill and taste somewhat severely to prevent the lack of antiquity from impressing you as bare and comfortless. She had succeeded, however, as she generally did in whatever she undertook. The mansion, a large and imposing edifice, required furniture on the same scale of grandeur and magnificence. Lady Eleanor had ransacked Holland and Italy for her old oak and marqueterie cabinets, her inlaid ivory and ebony, her china, her tapestry, and her carvings. She had caused the ceilings to be painted by Italian artists, and the walls to be panelled with old leather from Cordova. There was everything to please the eye, and nothing to offend the taste, though possibly the quantity of beautiful things might, in some persons' opinion, have detracted from their quality, and conveyed the discordant impression of confusion in an old curiosity shop. The interior of the house was the true picture of its mistress's mind, irregular, capricious, and withal fascinating.

Lady Eleanor was a woman of limited culture, such as the age produces; she really knew very little, though she had picked up

a good deal, and discoursed eloquently on decoration and bric-a-brac.

Maud and Luce seated themselves on a crimson plush divan under a large tree-palm set in a massive gilt basin, while Dick with masculine heedlessness leant against the exquisitely carved oak chimney-piece on which stood some bits of priceless Chelsea, and Mrs. Hardfast and Lady Eleanor sipped tea out of handleless old Worcester cups.

“This is a perfect palace of enchantment,” said Dick bending toward his hostess, “I can’t think how you collected such quantities of pretty things.”

She smiled complacently. “I generally manage to pick up things wherever I go. Ah! I have saved Mr. Highview oceans of money, I assure you. If you buy from a dealer you are certain to be robbed. Now a great deal of this furniture here I found in old country-houses, inns, Venetian palaces, and out-of-the-way places. This house literally cost nothing to furnish, and yet I have matchless cabinets and priceless tapestry.”

Mr. Highview, who had walked up to the table, on which stood a shaded lamp, to try

and decipher the “Times” in the dim light his wife preferred, smiled and said—

“This house cost a pretty penny, though, my dear. I never meant to spend half as much when I began.”

“Of course!” Lady Eleanor effectively waved her plump white hand as if to avert further argument, “people cannot expect everything for nothing; only the Rothschilds can beat our collection of bric-a-brac, and I assure you, Mr. Carrol, I am not to be surpassed in bargains.”

“I can quite believe it,” said Dick turning to look at Maud, who made an artistic picture at that instant. She was leaning back against the crimson velvet cushion, in a pose of studied languor, her fair complexion and golden hair standing out in brilliant relief, her full lips curled in contemptuous indifference, her beautiful arm, the sleeve falling back and displaying its snowy contour, raised and reposing loosely among the cushions, while from her hand depended a feather fan. Dick could not help gazing admiringly, for she was tantalizingly beautiful, though his mind strayed absently to other memories. He was for ever and ever,

like an ill-trained hound, harking back, and living over again the past; for the love of imagination and regret cannot be blotted out in an instant, as we run our fingers over the drops on a window-pane and merge each little stream into one large one. Lady Eleanor was unaware of his preoccupation; she knew but little of Lady Fenchurch, and credited no woman except herself with unlimited power over men. She had welcomed him effusively and monopolized him instantly, and Dick felt at once that he now no longer belonged to himself. Yet his thoughts took a somewhat sombre tinge as he sat alone in his bedroom for a few moments before dinner thinking.

“I am in for it now I suppose, and I must try and succeed, though I hate the whole affair. I shall ask Highview who my opponent is. Maud was right,” he continued diverging to another topic, “that niece of Lady Eleanor’s *is* a plain girl. I suppose she will have money to compensate. Maud looks well; she grows handsomer every day.” And therewith the fortunate young man, who could find pretty women to flatter and talk to him wherever he went, rose, and, ringing

for his valet, began to dress for dinner. When the ladies left the dining-room with a noise and rustle of silky draperies, and Maud had thrown him one last seductive smile, Dick drew his chair up to that of his host, and began. “Tell me, Mr. Highview, is everything satisfactory, I am not likely to find any opposition, eh?”

“I’m sorry to say that is not the case—here have a glass of claret, it’s 1870 La Rose, and *I* can recommend it—the man who has chosen to come forward is a certain Sir Hilary Fenchurch.”

Dick seized the claret decanter and poured himself out a full glass, which he drank off before he answered. “Is this certain?”

“Yes, I’m afraid so; he has engaged Camps as his agent, Dewsnap the West Thorpe lawyer is working for him; it means money I am afraid.”

“Granny will do all that’s necessary in that way, but if I am to have no chance, and how can I, a young untried man, against Sir Hilary Fenchurch? would it not be better to retire gracefully before we spend our money, and engage our honour in the battle?”

“ My honour is engaged already; I have promised that you shall come forward, and Lady Eleanor is bent upon it; it would never do to disappoint her; she has elected you as her champion young man, and you know what ladies are when they’ve made up their mind to a thing.” Dick smiled uncomfortably, he scarcely relished the idea of being any lady’s champion young man; “ I do not care to be used as a puppet,” he said, “ and lead a forlorn hope.”

“ A forlorn hope! God bless you, it’s nothing of the sort. You shall write M.P. to your name before three months are over. Sir Hilary has not a chance, the Conservatives’ day is past. You must not take fright at the very outset; what will Lady Eleanor say? ”

Dick remained silent, and fingered his glass thoughtfully. “ They like Londoners down here,” put in one of the party, an elderly gentleman, whose red face gleamed like a peony from the folds of his voluminous white neck-cloth, “ they think more of strangers than of the men who have grown up among them.”

“ Fellows about here are such cads,” remarked another young man with a lisp.

“Sir Hilary Fenchurch is not a cad, I believe?” inquired Dick.

“I don’t mean him, but the small squires and the well-to-do farmers; the shopocracy are all as dull and obstinate as pigs. You’ll have your work cut out for you, I can tell you; I wouldn’t stand for such a county as this.”

“The prospect does not seem encouraging; what do you say, Mr. Highview, shall we give it up?”

“What! and leave the party in the lurch? decidedly not! The county can and will be won by a Liberal, and you’re the man.”

“Oh! certainly,” said the afore-mentioned old gentleman, who appeared in imminent risk of choking, and whose nose was growing purple. It was evident that fate intended Dick to be thrust into a position for which he had no especial liking, and the more fate forced it upon him the more he felt inclined to renounce the project.

“You have made up your mind on all necessary questions, I suppose?” said Mr. Highview, dismissing Dick’s scruples airily. “Are you going to be an independent member, or follow Gladstone implicitly?

that's the safest for a young fellow. There's the franchise, and the Irish difficulty, and the agricultural labourers, and a dozen more things to occupy your attention. I fear I am still an old Whig, and perhaps you'll consider me retrograde, but I confess I am a little afraid of such sweeping changes. Fortunately the Tories serve the purpose of putting on the drag when we are rushing down hill at a breakneck pace."

"I am not a party man," said Dick ; "I think people ought to have good air, and good water, and good houses ; it's a shame they should have to live in pig-sties ; but I don't know how it is to be managed."

"Ah ! then you must stick to your party. The party will find all that out, and the party will do it, and you must just follow in the wake like an obedient sheep. No measure is possible till you have got up a party cry ; then a strong opposition helps rather than retards legislation—remember, to hate and abuse your adversaries is the first duty of a politician."

"Must I abuse Sir Hilary ? because I am really better with my fists than with my

tongue, and should much prefer a good stand-up fight."

"I am sorry to observe, Carrol, that you are not half in earnest and impressed with the serious undertaking you have before you; well, you had better see Gubbins in the morning, he will soon talk you over—he is our agent, you know."

"I hope he will, I'm sure; but I wish I were well out of the affair."

Dick already repented; political life seemed a great deal of trouble, and only a shabby concern if you were to follow your leader in sheeplike fashion, and the antagonism to Sir Hilary Fenchurch, with the hard words and rough attacks that must be bandied about and dealt round, displeased him mightily. Evelyn might take it as an insult. Evelyn, the woman he loved! He loved her still. He felt it—he knew it—and her husband was his opponent. Besides, a parliamentary career was dull and tiresome when stripped of the glamour of excitement. Bruce had said it was a life worth living certainly, but then Bruce was an enthusiast, and enthusiasts, he believed, invariably existed in abject poverty, and died young.

and miserably. Everyone at Highview Castle seemed to take it for granted that Dick was urged by the purest political ambition and aspired to legislate when the real truth remained—that he had no aspirations, and hated trouble. However, it seemed impossible to draw back, and the next day Dick and Mr. Highview jogged slowly along together in the direction of West Thorpe. Luce had lost her ride, as she feared, and was boxed up in the schoolroom helping Maud to trim a ball-gown.

The day was soft, the bare hedges hung with sparkling dewdrops ; the distance lay bathed in delicate violet and blue tints ; the birds twittered merrily in the bushes. Dick felt better ; he had slept well, and his usual easy temper had returned, and Mr. Highview's face was a study of healthy placidity.

“What kind of a man is Sir Hilary ?” suddenly asked Dick ; “is he popular ?”

“So-so ; he is of the good old school of sleepy Conservatives, kind-hearted but narrow minded ; would help a friend with his last shilling, but considers poverty a convenient arrangement of Providence for the benefit of the upper classes. Prefers

to encourage ignorance and respectful dependence in the peasantry; thinks it natural that an aged labourer should look to the workhouse as his only reward, and wonders that a man cannot keep his family on twelve shillings a week."

"I wish I could decide on the right line to take."

"Carrol, you must certainly have your opinions cut and dried; if you can't find out for yourself what is best, just become a disciple of somebody else, take it on trust; only be sure of your facts, and, whatever you do, be thorough."

"Irresolution is my bane."

"Better be vicious than irresolute; a man out-grows the one but the other clings about him like ivy about the tree, and smothers life eventually."

West Thorpe wore an every-day appearance, the sluggish river that belted the town flowed along in a dull, oily stream, showing reflections a trifle more deep and defined than usual; a few scattered groups, evidently discussing politics, stood about here and there, and, as a labourer lifted his hat to Mr. Highview, he nudged his neighbour and

pointed out in a hoarse whisper, “the young man who’s going to contest the county.” Some women, busy at the wash-tub, hurried to the doors wiping the soapsuds from their naked arms, and stared eagerly at Mr. Highview, who trotted quickly on, and drew up at the “Dog and Partridge Hotel,” where Mr. Gubbins awaited them. The latter was short and thickset and confident, and his brisk jolly manner soon set people at their ease.

“I’m glad you’ve come, Mr. Highview,” he said, turning to the table spread with letters and telegrams, “there’s plenty to do, and it’s high time we got our address out. Sir Hilary’s is placarded all over the town. I hope you are a thorough-paced Liberal, Mr. Carrol. It’s the only paying thing now-a-days. If you hang back neither party will claim you. You must promise everything, and carry out what you can afterwards, but above all display a fine programme.”

Dick, having consented to be a candidate, could not refuse to put himself into the knowing Mr. Gubbins’s hands, who forthwith drew up a document full of glowing promise, advanced views, and compliments flattering to the intelligence of the free and enlightened

electors which, having read over and pronounced to be very good, he sent off to the printers with the ink still wet upon the paper.

“Sir Hilary can’t beat that,” he chuckled ; “he only promises to uphold Church and State and the old institutions of the country. Vague, sir, very vague, no progress there, nothing to satisfy. Your Radical is the true friend of the people, and I’m happy to say they are getting to know it at last. Now, then, gentleman, suppose we go and call on a few of your leading supporters.”

Yardley, the draper, was the first to fall under this category ; he was a lean, sallow, and discontented looking person, and, when asked for his vote, replied—

“I won’t promise, I’m sure, sir ; there’s folk from London come, and they say this, and they say that, just to get themselves into Parliament. I’ve no call to complain of a Liberal government. Certainly Mr. Gladstone is fair enough, and I daresay he does his best, but we’ve all got to live, and I don’t see as food is cheaper, or trade better. And, what with the Factory Acts and the early-closing movement, we don’t do near as good a business as we did.”

Dick, well primed by Gubbins, glibly explained that legislation had done much for the country, and that, if trade was not as prosperous as it might be, indeed, positively slack, so deplorable a state of things must be traced to the Tories, and their unreasonable foreign wars.

“Look here, now,” said Mr. Gubbins, “how about sugar—isn’t sugar cheap? Mrs. Yardley likes her tea sweet, and I’m sure the children love jam.”

“I don’t deny as you speak fair,” said the draper, “but the Government is always for helping those who can’t help themselves or keep their earnings when they’ve got them; the respectable tradespeople that pay their way honestly get no privileges. Well, I can’t promise—I’ll see.”

Mr. Sands the grocer came next. He was strong on the Church question, and did not much care which government was in power so long as it did not uphold the State Church. “It’s a iniquity, that’s what it is, sir, that State Church. I can’t abide the parsons, with their copes and albs, and stuff and nonsense; red-hot popery, sir, that’s what it is; and such a lot of new-

fangled services, as if you come a bit late a man can't tell if it's the litany or the burial-service they're saying. We pay them parsons to preach the gospel, don't we? Well, when my missus was ill for full six weeks, not one of 'em so much as came to read to her, though they called pretty smart for a subscription to the improvements of the church. Straw chairs, is it, sir? and paint and pictures, that's what they call improvements; I don't, sir, I calls 'em idolatrous. Well, they do say as the Prime Minister has leanings to Rome, but I can't believe it, for didn't he disestablish the Irish Church? and a very good job too. I read the Bible daily, and I know what's what in religion, and my missis she thinks the same as I do."

Dick listened meekly to this diatribe, and when they passed out Gubbins whispered to the grocer, "He is a true Christian that young man, studies his Bible regularly, you needn't be afraid to vote for him."

As they proceeded on their house-to-house visitation Dick soon discovered that the science of politics was a sealed book to most voters; each one had his own grievance or

personal fad, and each one looked no further than the bounded horizon of his own prejudices, making himself and his private interest the pivot round which revolved the questions of progress, religion, social reform, or education. Dick, who was honest, though indolent, found it hard to make the contradictory promises which his position demanded of him ; he minded less the shaking of hands and kissing of babies than the false words and fair speeches which it was his duty impartially to distribute. But Gubbins made up for all shortcomings ; he exhorted, praised, joked, and flattered each independent elector until he more or less obtained a promise of support. On the homeward road they fell in with an old labourer in a smock-frock, carrying a basket of tools on his shoulder. His white locks streamed in the wind and his honest weather-beaten countenance was seamed and traversed by deep lines of care and toil.

“Ah, Peter, how are you ?” said Mr. Highview cordially, reining up his horse to speak to him ; then in an undertone to Dick, “He’s a stonemason, an honest fellow enough, though eccentric, and has the unbounded

confidence of all his mates. Now, Peter, here's the young gentleman who wishes to have the honour of representing you in Parliament ; what chance has he, do you think ? ” Peter touched his cap, lifted his eyes cautiously and quietly, and scratching his head replied, after prolonged deliberation, “ He be a foine young gentleman for sartin to look at ; but have he stuff in him ? that's what he must show us. He be a gentleman, and I s'pose he's a gentleman's ideas. He's a Liberal, be he ? Well, now, I never can tell rightly how they can put they four things together, a gentleman, a landlord, a magistrate, and a radical. It's a queer medley ; there ain't no Liberals now, we must be radicals or nought—a friend of the people and one of the people. No, no, it's nought to me what kind of a government's in power ; it strikes me there'll always be poor men, and the rich will be always a talking of helping 'em, but as our Lord said, and he *wer* a man of the people and no mistake : ‘ the poor ye have always with you.’ If the working man is to be helped let him help himself, there's noone else can do it ; but, as far as I see, there must always be toil

and trouble and sorrow, and then death—that's the best of all; folks can rest and none to rail at 'em. Oh, I dare say the young gentleman 'ull do well enough, and I wish your friend luck, for you're a kind and just landlord, Mr. Highview, and so long as there must be landlords I've no fault to find wi' ye; ye means well, I know; but I says to my mates, ' lor bless yer, don't yer trust to the government, but trust to yourselves.' Good day, sir, I've a long trudge afore me still, and I wish you well, young gentleman, that I do." The old man nodded, took up his basket of tools, and trudged on.

"There, there's a specimen of the working man," said Mr. Highview, "he isn't grateful, and he isn't happy, and he works hard, and he enjoys his grumble, but he is patient: oh, the patience of the poor! it is wonderful, it passes all belief. He was a violent Trades-unionist and speaker once, but he has calmed down now, and has seen the error of his ways."

"I wonder if that is what we shall all come to," mused Dick, "to spend the best years of our life pursuing a phantom, and then at the last say 'there is nothing good

but death. I might as well never have lived."

"Peter *has* lived for something. The condition of the labourers is much improved during the last few years—they are better housed, better clothed, better fed; and he has a son to whom he has given a good education, and who bids fair to be a master mason one day. Peter has only sobered down; he is getting old, you see, as we all must, and the enthusiasm of youth is giving place to quiet common sense."

"So much for education. Are we not better without it? It is Pegasus harnessed to a plough, and the divine animal has the worst of it, I think," said Dick, bitterly.

"Not a bit of it; when your joints grow stiff, it is a pleasure to go steadily, and youth, with all its daring, occasionally gets some remarkably unpleasant knocks and tumbles."

CHAPTER VIII.

“ HERE, Evelyn, is that the kind of thing you like ?” said Sir Hilary, one morning, throwing a pale blue velvet jewel-case into Lady Fenchurch’s lap.

“ Hilary ! Oh, how beautiful ! ” Evelyn glanced with admiration at the rows of snowy pearls reposing on their velvet cushion.

“ You said the other night that you liked pearls better than any other precious stones, so I sent for these.” Sir Hilary put his hands in his pockets, and aired his back before the fire.

“ They are lovely ; but I meant nothing. I never thought of your giving me any ; they must have cost a great deal.”

Lady Fenchurch’s manner was more grieved than glad.

“ Well, never mind ; the money is mine to

do as I like with, and the pearls are yours to wear. Give me a kiss, and mind you put them on to-night."

Evelyn raised her face obediently, and Sir Hilary, having deposited a kiss on her cheek, departed. His wife looked again sadly at the pearls. She had never cared for jewels or finery, and just now she cared still less. Her mind was running on other topics, and straying into forbidden grooves. It cost her a bitter pang to hear Dick's name in everyone's mouth, to be told of the favourable impression he had created, to read his address, and to find him the universal subject of conversation. Miss Fenchurch, pishing and pshawing, had received a local paper containing a report of his first speech, and Evelyn with a blush at her own infatuation, had secured the paper and hidden it carefully at the bottom of one of her drawers. She had not yet met him; indeed, she hoped to be spared this ordeal; but she could not help listening eagerly for his praises. Sorely did she chide herself for disloyalty to Sir Hilary, while she regarded his presents as the price she received for the surrender of her love. Sir Hilary treated her like a child, petted and spoiled her, and

gave her jewellery, fancying she needed nothing else ; but she, who had tasted one brief moment of dangerous rapture, knew that gifts were but a poor substitute for love. Had she only known sooner, or had she but possessed the courage to tell Sir Hilary the truth, and break off her engagement, all would have been well, but a foolish fear and a mistaken sense of duty had withheld her, and there was nothing for it now but to trample down the restless longing in her heart and to become in thought, as she was in deed, a blameless wife. With a sigh Evelyn locked up her jewel-case, and ill at ease set forth on her daily walk. She directed her steps in the opposite direction to West Thorpe, and, having climbed a steep and stony lane, halted to take breath. The still November hush was over everything ; not a sound broke the silence ; it was too late for the song of the thrush, and too early for the bleat of the lambs. The sun struggled vainly through the heavy grey clouds that almost touched the long row of green fields with their black and leafless bordering of trees, stretching away into the dim distance ; the tints were crude and colourless, the sky

low and gloomy. Evelyn leant her head on her hands, and rested by the stile thinking. She was too depressed to care much for the present, or to anticipate the future. A shadowy presentiment encompassed her. Presently the sound of a horse's trot roused her from her reverie, and, fearful lest Sir Hilary should find her sentimentalizing, to which mental pursuit he bore an undying grudge, she turned quickly from the stile towards the road. As she did so she perceived that, contrary to her supposition, Dick was the rider. He pulled up his horse abruptly, and stopped. Evelyn's colour had fled, her lips were white and trembling, her fine brown eyes uplifted pitifully. Dick could not pass on without speaking to her.

“Lady Fenchurch,” he said—he had schooled himself to speak the name—“have you forgiven me?” This was not at all what he meant to say, but it served the purpose as well as any other speech, and broke the ice.

“I have wished so much to meet you.” Here he jumped off his horse, and approached. “I want to speak to you; may I walk with you a little way?”

Evelyn bowed her head ; she dared not trust herself to speak.

“ When we met last,” he pursued, “ you know what my feelings were — ”

“ Don’t speak so,” she interrupted, “ that is all over, talk of yourself and your prospects.”

“ I know that is all over,” he said, bitterly ; “ you spoilt my life for me, and you do not like to think of it ; but, if even you forbid me to speak of them, my feelings are unchanged. I have done my very best to forget you, believe me ; I have plunged into this political career, which strikes me as barren to the core, and I work hard, which I hate, and try not to remember. I can’t do more. Is my presence here so distasteful to you, can you not even forgive me for opposing your husband ? I did not know when I accepted the candidature that there was any chance of his coming forward—for, of course, in that case I should never have allowed myself to be nominated.”

“ I do not mind,” she said, quietly, “ I shall never see you ; our paths in life are quite separate ; I have no possible right to dictate to you what you shall or shall not do.

But I am glad also that we met to-day—because the last time—you misunderstood me;” her eyes filled with tears. Dick longed to kiss away those tears, but he walked doggedly along, his horse’s bridle drawn through his arm, scarcely daring to look at her. To all appearance they were merely taking a casual stroll, but Evelyn’s heart felt nigh to breaking, and Dick was mad with rage and love.

“ We understand one another now,” he said presently. “ Oh yes, you will think of me sometimes—as a friend—I will carry the remembrance of you to my dying day, best and dearest of friends—but—you look so pale—you are not unhappy ? ”

“ No, no. I am very well. I heard that your first speech was much approved of—I was glad, you know—I should like you to persevere—some day perhaps you will be famous.”

“ Do you wish me to succeed, then ? ”

“ You forget Sir Hilary.”

“ I cannot even ask for your good wishes,” he said, bitterly; “ it is hard—and our political views don’t coincide, or perhaps you have none—do politics bore you ? ”

“ No indeed.” It could not be doubted

that no topic chosen by Dick would bore her, so long as he refrained from speaking of love. “Is it pleasant at Highview?”

“Pretty well, very magnificent! —they are most kind and hospitable — and Mr. Highview is a downright good fellow.”

“And she?”

“Oh, she is good-natured enough, though she does treat that wretched little niece of hers with unnecessary severity; fortunately Maud takes her part and stands up for her.”

“Maud Hardfast! your cousin Maud; is she staying there, too?” Evelyn’s voice expressed dismay.

“Oh yes, she is there, and her mother also, they are going to stay some time.”

“Then I need not ask if Highview Castle is a pleasant place to stay in. Why do you deceive me, Dick?” In her emotion she spoke his name inadvertently, and emboldened by this he seized her hand.

“Deceive you, Evelyn! I could never do so.”

“Oh yes, you can—you pretend to care for me, and all the while you are flirting and making love to your cousin Maud—of course you are right, she is very beautiful—but it is cruel of you to deceive me, and make me

wretched.” Evelyn drew her hand away angrily.

“Why, I am not engaged to her, I don’t really care a fig for my cousin,” this in a tone of surprise.

“But you will marry and learn to care for her.”

“We have known one another from childhood, we are only friends — surely you understand this.”

“Just now *I* was to be your friend.”

“So you are, Evelyn dearest; how you torture me!”

“I am wrong, Dick, don’t speak to me any more; I can’t help it, I have no right to find fault — who am I? — oh, leave me, pray, and never, never come near me again.”

“I cannot leave you like this, Evelyn; how excited, how unjust you are! I don’t want to marry; I am your devoted slave; it is you who drive me away — believe me, I ask no more than to be always with you.”

“And that can never be. Goodbye, Dick — Mr. Carrol.”

“Remember,” he said earnestly, “I love you; I shall love you always; when you need me send for me. I am always yours.”

He remounted quickly, and rode off, leaving Evelyn in a dream. She had rejoiced to see him again. The sight of his handsome face had sent her pulses bounding madly with joy, till almost immediately her happiness was dashed by a fierce feeling of jealousy. Five minutes of conversation had thus utterly disarranged her life. She was impressed with a sense of her weakness, her wickedness, her ingratitude to Sir Hilary. Only flight could save her; it was ignominious but sure. She must avoid Dick at all hazards; they must not meet again. Was she not trembling like an aspen-leaf, while her hand was cold, and her cheeks burning with a painful flush.

When she reached home, though feeling faint with bodily fatigue, she proceeded at once to the library, where tea was usually served. Sir Hilary was there in a sullen mood.

“ You are late,” he said shortly, “ and must be tired.”

“ Yes, I am tired.” She threw off her hat and gloves and sat down. “ I had a long walk; shall I go and change my things, or make you some tea first? ”

“ My sister made the tea long ago, as you were out,” he answered, in an aggrieved tone.

“ Oh ! I am very sorry. It shall not happen again, Hilary.”

“ Where did you walk ? ” he asked, trying to seem more gracious.

“ Towards Fairholt ; the road is less muddy.”

“ Ah ! then you must have met Dick Carrol ; pray did you speak to him ? I heard he was to be at Fairholt Rectory to-day.”

“ Yes, I met him ; ” Evelyn tried hard to keep her voice steady. “ We talked for a few minutes.”

“ You never told me you knew him ; it was quite accidentally that I heard he was staying at the Milner’s when you were there last spring.”

Evelyn, sitting in the hot lamp-lit library, turned suddenly cold. What had Sir Hilary heard ? What could he mean ?

“ I did not think you would care about it,” she said.

“ My opponent is naturally of interest to me,” he said drily, “ but you seem to forget

this—wives do not always have their husbands' interests at heart."

"Oh! but *I* have, Hilary, you know I have. I hope you will win the election—I should like to help you," she said, warmly.

Sir Hilary gave a sneering laugh.

"What is it, Hilary? what do you mean? have I offended you? Oh! do speak to me."

"Don't disturb yourself, my dear; I mean nothing; pray do not make a scene. You have walked too far, and are overtired; go to your room and lie down a little."

Evelyn rose. Her faintness and dizziness had increased. Sir Hilary's advice was excellent; she would go and lie down. He opened the door for her with his old-fashioned gallantry of manner, and kissed her forehead as she passed out.

"Lie down, dear, and you will be all right by dinner-time."

Certainly, it might be all right physically with her, yet she could not divest herself of a vague fear, and an apprehension that some deeper meaning lay in Sir Hilary's words. Hitherto Evelyn had only thought of herself and of what might have been; now a far

more dreadful phantom reared itself before her affrighted gaze, the phantom of domestic troubles and misunderstandings. Would the great fight soon include, not only her own passions and desires, but the subtle encroachments of a husband's jealousy? He jealous of her, she jealous of Dick; what a tangle! Bitterly did she rue the folly and vacillation which had prevented her from proclaiming her love for Dick, and throwing off the bonds of her engagement, when to have done so would have cost neither truth nor irrevocable pain. There are few people who do not, like Evelyn, hang the veil of expediency before the inner portal of the temple of truth, dreading to look upon the features of the stern goddess without some shadow of protection. Evelyn had said to herself: "I cannot—I dare not," and the fiction had become fact. Sir Hilary was a reasonable man, and had she treated him reasonably she need never have regretted it. But it was too late now, and her slight deviation from the path of honesty was likely to lead her into a perfect maze of misery.

CHAPTER IX.

THE meeting with his lady-love sorely damped Dick's spirits, which were beginning to rise again with universal encouragement, and the prospects of success. She was his lady-love still, at least, in his dreams, he had not yet accustomed himself to think of her as the wife of another man. She was the same Evelyn, as sweet, as gentle, as pretty, yet not the same; she was a woman now, oppressed by a woman's responsibilities, hampered by a woman's duties, and no longer the bright, careless girl he had known in that brief time of mutual passion. She was far removed from him, indeed, it was a sin even to think of her. And yet he recalled with delight the sparkle of her eye, the flush of her cheek at his unexpected appearance, and the glory of ambition faded into insignifi-

cance when he compared it with the madness of love.

The company were just filing into dinner like an army of well-dressed mutes as Dick descended the staircase. He offered his arm to the nearest lady, who proved to be his cousin Maud. She was looking her best in a dress of pale blue, but he scarcely cared for her beauty to-night. She rallied him playfully on his moodiness, saying, "I declare you must have seen a ghost to-day, you look quite scared."

He had indeed seen a spectre, the ghost of a dead love, but he did not confess to her the correctness of her supposition. In the same bantering tone he answered, that it was the loss of her presence that had made him so dull, and praised her dress. Luce's observant eyes watched them across the table; she knew Maud's enterprise, and she thought she read success in her smiles and blushes. Dick did not see that he was observed; a plain little girl could scarcely arouse his vanity, and he allowed her plenty of leisure to pursue her observations. The dinner was a triumph of French cookery, for Lady Eleanor kept a culinary artist on the premises

and gave as much attention to her “salmis” as to her guests’ conversation. Dick, hungry from his ride, did justice to the delicacies set before him, and quaffed largely of his champagne glass. Elated by the froth and sparkle of talk and wine, he presently adventured himself into a flirtation with Maud. This was not difficult with such considerate encouragement as she gave him, and, if hearts are not caught in the rebound, at least vanity is. Later in the evening, Maud fluttered down on to a deep, soft couch, bedded with embroidered cushions and hidden behind a large porphyry vase. Luce found her out there and took the place beside her which Maud had mentally reserved for Dick. “How cold it is to night!” said the plain girl shivering, “I am sure there must be a frost.”

“Very likely; I don’t feel the cold,” said Maud, luxuriously spreading out her fair white hands and contemplating them. “What a chilly little creature you are! go and warm yourself by the fire,” she added, her sympathy being largely mixed with a desire to get rid of her tactless friend before the arrival of the gentlemen.

“No, I will stay here a little. What were you and Mr. Carrol talking about at dinner? He looked so interested.”

“He is always interested—with me, we understand one another,” said the beauty, languidly, not unwilling to be credited with power. “Men generally like the society of women who can enter into their thoughts.”

“How can you enter into their thoughts?” said plain matter-of-factness. “What does a girl know of a man’s real feelings?”

“Dear me, Luce, how stupid you are! One must study them of course.”

“Exactly.” Luce relapsed into silence. Luce had been studying too, with what success she knew not.

“Come over here, Luce,” cried Lady Eleanor, sharply, at that instant. “Why do you hide yourself away in a corner?” Luce rose obediently, and Maud thus attained her object. Bruce, in answer to a summons from Dick Carrol, had arrived at the Castle, and the two friends strolled in together from the dining-room; but an electric flash from Maud’s eyes promptly brought Dick to his senses, and a rapid twist of his heel landed him by the couch to which the

vacant seat invited him. Bruce, who knew no one, glanced indifferently about ; he was like a mole, half-blinded by the light of many wax candles and the blaze of jewellery ; he missed his round table, the little reading-lamp, and the familiar folios. Lady Eleanor's loud, sonorous, and yet lady-like tones rang like a Greek chorus in his ear. As he stood motionless, not timid, yet strange, with luminous eyes and bent, reed-like figure, Luce, her lashes wet with tears, turned from the two eager whispering figures on the couch, and beheld Bruce standing thus lonely and unobserved. A feeling of sympathy prompted her to approach him, and say in a voice as soft as the summer wind :

“ You are Mr. Carrol’s friend, are you not ? He was telling us to-day how much he looked forward to your arrival.”

Bruce, responsive to her directions, sat down in a high-backed satin chair, and looked keenly at her before answering. The beauty of her eyes astonished him ; he was not accustomed to such eyes, for a tender, sensitive soul spoke from them. He was unusually indifferent to mere beauty of form and colouring, but intelligence and reason-

ableness in a woman seemed to him worthy of attention.

“Yes, I trust I am Dick’s greatest friend. He is a dear fellow, a fine character, though undeveloped. The education of the day is answerable for that; it fritters away a man’s energies and leaves him no time for concentration.”

“You approve his political opinions?” she questioned.

“Certainly, they are my own. Progress must be every man’s ideal. I wish to see the moral condition, the social status, of the people raised. That, it seems to me, is the religion of politics, the spiritual side which everything worth labouring for must possess. Politics are not essentially earthly; it is a mistake to treat them so, when they refer to man’s highest good, to the victory of morality over self-interest. Each man has a political duty towards himself and others from the mere fact that he is a citizen of the state; to be indifferent to this duty is a blunder and a sin.”

“I never thought of politics in that sense. You are a great student, Mr. Bruce, I believe?”

“ I could not live away from my books, those silent, faithful, satisfying, friends.”

“ And you prefer them to men and women? Perhaps you are right,” she added, softly.

“ Excuse me, I did not say that. I am truly attached to Dick, with a quiet disinterested feeling that is perhaps somewhat old-fashioned, and I can see that the girl he is speaking to is extremely handsome. I think I understood her name to be Miss Hardfast.”

“ Yes, she is thought very beautiful,” Luce sighed. It was not a sigh of envy, but yet it contained regret.

“ She is handsome, but it is not a beauty that appeals to me, it is too sensual. The young lady is not troubled with soul. If Dick marries her it will be his ruin.”

“ Do you, who are his friend, think he will marry her?” questioned Luce with unnecessary eagerness.

“ I cannot tell. He is not in love with her now; if he were, his actions would be incomprehensible, and mysterious of course.”

“ Why?”

“ Because love is a madness, and there is no reason in insanity.”

“ That is a hard word. Mr. Carrol is

like what I imagine Alexander must have been. He is so strong, and healthy, and handsome."

Bruce looked at her with more attention; the girl's tones, soft as they were, had a warmth that puzzled him.

"Yes, perhaps; I never thought of his good looks, but of course women notice these things. And so you have read too Miss Windermere, I perceive you are a student, as you took a classical personage for your simile; pray be faithful to your studies; there is nothing to be compared with them; they are the staff of life."

"I am fond of reading, but I don't think deep study is good for women."

"Why so?"

"Because it makes them sometimes discontented with the common-place."

"Well?"

"And—and because men do not like it."

"Some men do."

"No, no indeed it does not answer, it is better not."

At this moment there occurred a general move among the company; a lady rose and went to the piano to sing; some of the gentle-

men disappeared into the smoking-room—music has that effect occasionally of inciting a desire for soporifics—and the two speakers were parted by the wave of motion, but Maud and Dick sat on behind their porphyry vase happy and quiescent.

“And so you speak in the town-hall to-morrow,” she was saying with a sclicitous deflection of her voice; “I must go even if I have to walk alone there; I do so want to hear you speak.”

“I had rather not, you will make me nervous.”

“You nervous, impossible!” Maud threw a cursory glance at his robust figure, his finely modelled hands, his clear eyes, and ruddy complexion, which were the incarnate expression of perfect health and strength.

“I assure you, I am really very nervous.”

“Leave that to the women, who are not sure of their own good looks and their powers of pleasing, like poor Luce, for instance; how shy she is! What does your agent say?” she added with interest.

“He is very sanguine, but then he is always sanguine. He is the kind of man who in a railway accident, with the dead and

dying around him, would exclaim, ‘Thank goodness, there are a good many saved ; it is not so bad as it might have been.’”

“What a charming temperament! I should like to know him.”

“Naturally therefore I cannot quite trust to his assurances, but still I hope to be successful, for I hate to be foiled at anything.”

“And why should you?” Maud contrived to throw a suggestive inflection into her voice conveying the certainty that, given Dick’s powers, success was inevitable.

“But now we really must go,” she said, seeing the room nearly empty, and Luce hovering near, “I want you to play a game of billiards with me.”

Lady Eleanor, however, who had her own ends in view, waylaid her at this instant, and carried her off to consult about some knotty point of dress or arrangement, and Luce and Dick were left standing alone.

“I have been talking to your friend, Mr. Bruce,” she said, rather timidly ; “how pleasant he is, and how devoted he seems to you.”

It was almost the first time she had addressed Dick since he entered the house, and her soft harmonious voice pleased his fas-

tidious ears. Maud's voice was clear and strong and agreeable enough in a fresh common-place way, but it had none of the delicate modulations and thrilling reedy sweetness of this one.

"I can't half appreciate Bruce," he answered, heartily, "he is so good, and so unselfish, and so clever; he works patiently and uncomplainingly, and really works for bread. It is not play, like everything I have done hitherto."

"But you are doing real work now?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"It must be pleasant to be a man," said Luce, reflectively, "to have a definite object to labour for, and to be able to follow one's own impulses."

"I am afraid one follows them rather too often; men have more temptations than women, you know."

"But then they are not nearly so much hampered. This election, now, I suppose it is your own choice?"

"Yes, and I assure you I care very little about it."

"Indeed! I think the sense of power must be fine, it must be nice to feel that you

can sway a multitude, that people listen for your opinion — don't you like that?"

"Well, you know my opinion isn't worth much, I know very little of these matters."

"But then you are learning."

Luce's quiet timid manner rather amused him, he thought he would try and draw her out; she paid him no compliments, and yet seemed to think far more seriously of his future than Maud, notwithstanding her sugar-plum flatteries. The atmosphere of the one girl braced, while the other enervated him.

"Are you going to the Town Hall?" he asked "I hope so."

"I think we are all going; Maud Hardfast has set her heart on it, and my aunt is so very fond of her, she is sure to humour her wishes."

"And are you not fond of her?"

"I like her very well, I don't think I am *fond* of anyone. Does not that imply a kind of renunciation of self, which I have certainly not yet reached —"

"And cannot understand?"

"Oh, yes, I can understand it. I can understand a man giving up everything for

a woman, and caring only to please her, and even doing foolish things, and—" here Luce caught Dick's astonished gaze, and hesitated,—"but of course I do not know anything about such things, and am never likely to."

"Why not?" he questioned kindly.

"Because I am plain, and men only care for beauty, and no one is likely to take a fancy to me."

"Men like nice women. I am sure you are nice."

Luce coloured painfully. He was laughing at her, she thought, and she felt the sting more acutely, because for once she had forgotten herself, and spoken out frankly without regard to conventionality.

"Why do you stop and look at me so?" he asked.

"I think it very bad taste on your part to laugh at a girl because she says openly what you are thinking in your heart," said Luce.

"By Jove! I—I beg your pardon; that isn't true. I wasn't laughing, I was thinking I had never met a really modest girl before. I am not a good hand at making protestations, but upon my word, believe me, I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world."

* “Plain people ought to have no feelings.”

“Look here, Miss Luce, to show you I mean what I say, and to prove to me you don’t bear malice, will you talk to me again to-morrow evening, and tell me some of your ideas? They are so fresh and new to me, you know, I did not think it possible for a woman to be entirely without vanity.”

They had wandered thus talking into the billiard-room, and a reproachful look from Maud, who was playing billiards, arrested him.

“Come here,” she cried, “please chalk my cue, and do tell me what stroke I had better make next. You said I was to be your pupil, and you have never been near me at all.”

Dick expressed his regret, chalked the cue, and, shutting one eye, deliberated upon the chances of Maud’s ball hitting the cushion and cannoning off, or rolling straight into the pocket. The game was exciting, and Maud, who knew how to pose herself so as best to display, when bending over the table, the full curves of her graceful bust, and the rounded plumpness of her beautiful arm, took every precaution that

Dick should not again stray from her side. She had been practising all the afternoon by herself, and now protested, with pretty little cries of alarm, that she could never, never, never hit that ball unless Dick would just show her how to hold the cue, and stand beside her to give her courage. When the stroke was completed, she would turn to Dick confidentially and express boundless gratitude for his advice. Dick, who was a fine player, grew proud of his pupil, and bestowed no further thought on quiet Luce, who sat by knitting a stocking, and listening half unconsciously to the spicy gossip with which Mrs. Hardfast and Lady Eleanor regaled her ears.

CHAPTER X.

It was decided to have an early dinner in preparation for the meeting in the Town Hall. Mr. Highview, Dick, and Julian Bruce were to start first, and the ladies to follow. The household was thrown into a state of confusion, for some of the servants had been given permission to attend the meeting, and the ladies' maids were running to and fro, answering the loudly pealing bells, and hurrying their mistresses' toilettes, in preparation for the unusually early meal. Luce was dressed in good time, and descended to the drawing-room, where she amused herself with a book of poetry, pending the arrival of the rest of the party.

She was calm and unhurried ; it was not her habit to hurry ; she had observed its disadvantages in the case of her aunt, who was

always writing letters, or giving orders, or holding audiences up to the very last moment, and then required to be inducted expeditiously into her gown by a trembling maid with awkward fingers, who generally broke the lace or fastened the hooks awry, to a running accompaniment of angry rebukes from Lady Eleanor. Mr. Highview kept to his dressing-room at these times, and slunk quietly down stairs when he was ready, lest he should be called on presently to adjudicate between mistress and maid, for after a certain period of terror and semi-imbecility the maid generally turned and treated her mistress to saucy answers, with the natural result of speedy dismissal. As these occurrences were frequent and the scarcity of good maids great, Lady Eleanor usually passed a great many weeks in a condition of abject dependence upon an obliging house-maid's services. Maud and Mrs. Hardfast possessed one maid between them, or rather it might be said that Maud had a maid, for the latter spent two hours with the daughter before she was permitted to bestow five minutes on the mother; and Mrs. Hardfast would wander helplessly in and out of her

daughter's room a dozen times in dressing-gown and slippers to find Maud invariably just trying on a wreath, taking down her hair that it might be done over again and please her better, or ordering another dress to be brought from the cupboard instead of the one previously decided upon. As these were the conditions of the ladies' toilets, it is needless to add that an early dinner disarranged everything, and that the poor maids had an extra hard time of it on this occasion. At last, however, the party started, six on each side, in an omnibus. Maud sat next the window, saying she required air; opposite her was young Arthur Sterney one of the company, and beside her Luce, whose fingers she could pinch occasionally when desirable, and whose elbow she could nudge if anything specially amusing or piquant attracted her notice. Luce was very quiet; she was thinking of Dick, and wondering how he would comport himself on the platform; whether his handsome face would grow red, or his eyes wander, and if he would stammer or stutter. She hoped not with all her heart, and felt quite sick as she reflected on the possibility of his breaking

down. Maud, on the contrary, full of spirits, laughed and talked and kept her hand in by an innocent flirtation with Arthur Sterney, who had torn himself away from London and the theatres, hearing that she was to make one of the party at the Castle. The other occupants of the omnibus were Mr. Glossary, the eminent critic, who cracked jokes and told spicy and improper stories to Lady Eleanor, under cover of her fan, as they rattled over the stony roads, and Lord Newlands and his wife. He had rendered valuable assistance to the Liberal Government at one period, and had been rewarded by a peerage in consequence. Lady Newlands, a Manchester heiress, dressed magnificently in the richest of brocades and satins, but remained a little uncertain as to her h's, and always spoke of her husband as "my lord."

The omnibus arrived in good time at the door of the Town Hall, around which clustered a crowd of dirty boys and men, with a few women holding babies, kept in order by an army of policemen. Maud stepped out gracefully, aided by Arthur Sterney, and followed by Luce, who tripped along by herself; next descended Lord Newlands, who

inadvertently trod on Lady Eleanor's toe and caused her to exclaim, under her breath, "Unmannerly wretch!" A great hunt then ensued among the cloaks and cushions for Lady Eleanor's smelling-bottle, which was at last found under the seat, having been used by Lady Newlands as a footstool during the drive; finally the stately procession marched up the hall and took their places on the long front row of chairs, provided for them. A great buzz of voices filled the air, people streamed in at the doors, and a few lads at the back tried to get up a disturbance. They were promptly hustled and knocked about into silence, and the proceedings commenced. Mr. Highview, the chairman, in a neat little speech recapitulated the object of the meeting, and begged leave to produce the new candidate for the honour of representing the county in Parliament. Dick stepped forward a little sheepishly and began, "Ladies and gentlemen." A storm of applause and hisses interrupted him; the hisses, having been hired, and being in the minority, were after a little while subdued, and Dick recommenced. He did not speak badly. He hesitated occasionally and re-

peated himself, and his political statements, though strong and damaging to the other side, were scarcely as clear or as logical as might have been wished, but his words were simple and almost colloquial, and thus appealed to the majority, and his sentiments were unexceptionable and manly. He created a favourable impression, and at the end of his speech the applause decidedly drowned the hisses. Dick sat down, a trifle out of breath and rather red in the face, but happy and satisfied. Mr. Highview slapped him on the shoulder, remarking, "You'll do very well, my dear fellow; you've said quite the right thing and pleased everybody." And Maud, who had nearly split her new tan suède gloves in applauding vigorously, now waved a red fan to and fro, familiarly, to imply that the speech had received her fullest approval.

Dick, during the whole of his speech, had been conscious of nothing, he could not have told who was in the hall, nor whether the three first benches were occupied by his personal friends; only once he had felt a kind of attraction, and caught a pair of eyes fixed upon him that seemed to pierce into

his brain and read his very thoughts. The eyes belonged to Luce, who, breathless, with parted lips, had followed every argument, thrilled to every inflection of his voice, reassured him by her sympathy and ready comprehension, and encouraged him by her approbation when he felt doubtful of the soundness of his arguments. And all this without speaking a word or moving a muscle, simply by the power of her eyes and of her self-abandonment to his influence. It was very strange. The quiet little girl seemed to comprehend him, to be warmed with the cool fire of his own rather lukewarm enthusiasm, so that involuntarily he made his points for her, sought her steady gaze, and knew that she was pleased. He was not accustomed to such sympathy, and felt grateful, that through the awkwardness of speech his true meaning had been interpreted, like a dumb animal whose demands for sugar or caresses are understood.

It was Bruce's turn next. He rose with a jerk, a lanky figure in a loose tweed suit, stopped for an instant, and looked round the hall with a wistful reflective gaze, then stroking his hair back from his high fore-

head, he spoke in quiet monotonous tones. Sundry exclamations burst from the audience, and a voice from the crowd cried, “Ain’t he thin? I wonder if he’s a vegetarian!” another, “My eyes, don’t he want drilling!” another, “Bill, is not he like a nice young hop pole?”

Utterly unmoved, the tall reedy figure, with the ascetic face and the long thin hands, proceeded steadily with his harangue until the very noisiest consented to listen. The quiet force of his character had conquered them. He expounded at considerable length his ideas of true politics, from an utterly unconventional standpoint. He gave them none of the usual common abuse of their adversaries, no clap-trap allusions, but he spoke like a philosopher; and as he warmed with his subject, his white face glowed, and his eyes dilated, until the concluding words fairly moved his audience to enthusiasm. “Friends, it is not for any party that I plead, but for the people. The voice of the people is the voice of God; the people are the first and last word of the British constitution; reform touches the people, the rights of property affect the people,

religion is the religion of the people, and politics means the welfare of the people." Shouts broke from the furthest corners of the packed multitude, applause shook the rafters and echoed over people's heads; the uproar was deafening. "He's the fellow for us." "My eyes, he is an out-and out demagogue." "That chap has got the gift of the gab." "Are you a Paddy with your fine blarney?" were some of the cries bandied about, but the general impression made was to the effect that he was a true and earnest man. Bruce retired to the back of the platform, paying no attention to the noise of the multitude; then turned deadly white, and begged a glass of water. The real orator, primed with the living fire of the gods, is moved himself with the force of his own convictions, and his influence over others is but the feeble reflex of the quiverings of his own soul. The rest of the speeches fell flat. Lord Newlands drivelled on, on every kind of irrelevant subject, till the impatience of the audience could no longer be subdued. Then Mr. Highview neatly joined together the various threads dropped by the speakers, and bound them into one consecutive and

plausible whole, and, after a vote of thanks to the chairman, the meeting terminated.

The order of the return journey was somewhat modified. Maud went in the landau with Lady Eleanor, and Luce sat next to Dick in the omnibus.

“How well you spoke!” Luce said at last, emboldened by the murmur of voices around her.

“Do you know,” he confessed, “that you were an enormous help to me. You have such a strange power; it seemed to me when I looked at you that you knew what I was trying to say, that you were disentangling my thoughts for me, and pushing me on. Have you ever been told this before —?”

“Yes, I have. I think the reason is that I am conscious, as it were, of two lives, the one is my own, the other that of any persons in whom I am interested. I seem to feel their sensations; to know what they are experiencing; to understand the effect of things upon them. I can almost speak their words before they utter them —”

“I never met with anything like it before,” said Dick, thoughtfully; “I should

like you to be always present when I have to make a speech."

"Should you?" Luce blushed a little under her swansdown.

"Yes. It is a most curious faculty; what can it be, do you think?"

"I suppose it is mesmeric. I live a great deal alone, and then I am very imaginative, When I am, as it were, placed in mental contact with persons, I live their life instead of my own, and am worked upon by the conditions that affect them ——"

"Have you ever talked to anyone about these things? I should like to know if ——"

"Oh, no, no!" Luce grew anxiously agitated; "please never mention anything about me. I should not like to be discussed. If you had not found this out I should never have told you ——"

"I promise not to speak of it, but tell me one thing. You said you must be interested in people before you felt this strange kind of sensation. Then you were interested in me?"

"I suppose I was," she said, shyly.

"We have scarcely ever spoken. Do you

know that was a great compliment to pay me?" he said after a pause.

"I did not mean it as a compliment."

"I am sure of that. You never compliment people, and yet you say prettier things than anyone I ever met. What did you think of Julian Bruce to-night?"

"He was splendid."

"Wasn't he? Now there's a man you ought to be '*en rapport*' with."

"No, he is stronger than I am; he is too self-contained, one cannot pierce to the depths of his soul. He would never have felt my influence as *you* did to-night."

"Then I shall keep you all to myself like a kind of Egeria—is that a compact, will you help me?"

"I will do what I can," said Luce, simply, "but you overrate my power. I am a very ordinary, quiet kind of person. Now, Maud Hardfast, for instance, is much cleverer."

"Perhaps, but you are not to be compared together. Maud is not really sympathetic, though she is very pleasant."

"And I am never thought pleasant. My aunt says I am so silent that no one cares to talk to me; in fact, Mr. Carrol, I am a

failure, a social failure. Haven't you found that out?"

"No, and, what's more, I don't believe it."

A sudden jerk here informed them that the omnibus was drawn up against the steps of the Castle, and one by one the company filed into the dining-room, where a tempting supper was laid out.

"What a ghost you look!" whispered Maud, unkindly, to Luce, who in her white cloak, and with her white cheeks, presented rather a spectral appearance. "I'll bet you've been asleep; it's such a stupid thing to do, one always wakes up to resemble an owl in an ivy-bush, blinking at the light. We sang all the way home. Arthur Sterney has a capital voice." Then Maud took Dick under her protection, and insisted on his helping her to chicken mayonnaise, and Lady Eleanor found fault because the footmen were so slow, and there were too many lights. Lady Eleanor's complexion was a little too delicate to stand a glare. Arthur Sterney began to tell quiet Luce stories about burlesque actresses, and Lord Newlands in a pompous voice entertained Mr. Highview with his views on

politics, and Lady Newlands hunted every-where for a diamond brooch she declared she had lost, and requested honest Bruce, who was dreamily munching sandwiches, to get up and shake the skirts of his coat, lest the brooch should have fallen into them. Meanwhile the butler poured him out a full glass of champagne, which in his disturbance he forgot to drink, a trifling fact which caused the butler to confide to the housekeeper that “that 'ere Bruce was a strange fellow, not used to the ways of gentlefolks, he dared say.”

And then, every body having congratulated every body else on the success of the even-ing, the ladies tripped away with a thousand good nights, the elder ones smothering a yawn behind their bed-candlesticks, the younger ones smiling at the men standing below, and the male members retired to the smoking-room to drink whiskey and water, and discuss politics, hunting, racing, and women, until one by one slipped off to bed in the small hours of the morning.

CHAPTER XI.

THE meeting in the Town Hall introduced a lull into the political campaign, and the following day, when Dick received a missive from his grandmother informing him of an indisposition traceable to a bad cold, and expressing a wish to see him, he determined to start off at once and pay the duty visit which had been so long deferred. Not that he objected to stay at what was virtually his home, nor that he was wanting in the fullest love and respect to his grandmother, who indeed deserved the very fullest, but because Long Leam was an extremely dull house, and his uncle and Aunt Vincent were staying there. Between his Aunt Vincent and himself there raged an honest, uncompromising hatred, which it may be confessed Dick took no trouble to diminish. However the dis-

agreeable duty had to be accomplished, and, supported by the faithful Bruce, whose arrival was duly notified to Mrs. Carrol by telegram, Dick started for his home.

Long Leam lay in a wooded, undulating district; the house itself stood on low ground, and might be considered an uninteresting pile of eighteenth century architecture, but the vast gardens and splendid grounds were an object of admiration to all visitors. They had remained untouched ever since they were laid out in the stiff and formal manner affected by our ancestors; the yew hedges had waxed round, and high, and portly, till they formed a massive wall of greenery; the turf grew as delicate, as thick, and as soft, as a lady's drawing-room carpet; the gravel-walks, broad and smooth, showed neither weed nor fissure; the square pieces of water, euphoniously called lakes, lay clear, and still, and limpid in the sunshine, as when they reflected the faces of a powdered belle or a bewigged beau; the trees and shrubs, carefully tended and punctually trimmed, reached the perfection of beauty and luxuriance; the old sun-dial stood, as it had stood for more than a century, stolid and moss-

grown and venerable, telling the time with praiseworthy inaccuracy; the very wild-fowl, fluttering and splashing about the reeds and bulrushes that adorned the edges of the mere, were descendants of the old birds introduced in the reign of the first George. Under those groves it was said Pope had walked, and in that alley Burke composed some of his most famous orations. The interior of the house corresponded; the rooms large and lofty, were but barely furnished, the sofas of an uncomfortable period, hard and high-backed; the damask curtains somewhat faded; and the tables spindle-legged and ugly; but then the beauty of the cabinets, massive and unique, the collection of old china, uncracked and unbroken, perfect and priceless, compensated for these drawbacks. The old print that hung in the hall depicted the mansion as it existed in the time of Queen Anne; and a comparison of the picture and the reality showed scarcely a bush or shrub to be missing. A respectable flavour of antiquity hung about the mansion, and, according to the disposition of the visitor, inspired him with feelings of gravity or contempt. The free-and-easy spirit of modern

society was entirely absent from these walls, of which the mistress herself was not the least appropriate adornment. A handsome old lady, with a complexion of rose and white as delicate as precious china, kind blue eyes, and the tenderest smile imaginable always hovering on the fine curved lips, so gracious and so innocent, a mouth that bespoke her nature, a nature never smirched with the sand and dirt so apt to bespatter us all, but full of imaginative charity, the charity that can picture others' temptations and make allowance for them ; she lived alone, and ruled her house with a mixture of gentleness and firmness. Always clad in the daintiest of silks, preserved by a little white muslin apron, her white hair gathered modestly beneath a pretty cap, set with ribbons to match her gown, and a bunch of keys and scissors hanging by her side, she formed a lovely picture. And even those who sneered on the score of old-fashionedness were constrained to own her beauty ; in her, old age was adorable, and the decline of life a glorious sunset. “Granny,” she was called by her son, Mr. Vincent Carrol, and her daughter-in-law Mrs. Vincent, and “Granny”

she was to everyone *par excellence*. Her stately dignity and her sweet sprightliness, her gentle consideration for the feelings of the humblest, were, indeed, things inexplicable to Mrs. Vincent, who was formed of coarse common clay, and rather despised, while she traded on, the Chelsea-china brilliancy and daintiness of the grandmother's composition. Mr. Vincent, who must have inherited some alien blood, loved his mother in a rough downright fashion, laughing a little at her peculiarities, yet rejoicing in the certainty of her generosity and forgiveness. For Mr. Vincent was her second son ; the eldest, Dick's father, had died young, quickly following his young wife, and Dick was the direct heir to Mrs. Carroll. That this brat should have lived, and have lived to be strong and handsome and hearty, considerably vexed Mr. Vincent and his wife, who had extravagant tastes and a quiverful of children. In vain Vincent, who was a bluff and red-faced sportsman, and a constant attendant at racecourses, ventured to cavil at his mother's openhandedness to her dependants, and to her grandson ; in vain Mrs. Vincent preached the necessity of self-denial

for young people; Mrs. Carrol, in her sweet, quiet way, paid everything young Dick asked her and a good deal he had the grace not to ask. For Dick Carrol had been given an Eton education, including unlimited pocket-money, had enjoyed a university career with its attendant hunting and other luxuries, had betted too, and lost occasionally, and his grandmother, after a few serious words of warning, had settled his debts. Now she was embarked in all the expenses of an election, and, to use Vincent's words, "there seemed no end to the thing." Vincent himself would have liked to bet largely and keep racehorses, but his means only allowed of clandestine and fringe-like visits to racecourses, and a doubtful hanging on to the skirts of turf notoriety, and the contrast between his purse and his natural desires sharpened his jealousy and dislike of his nephew. Mrs. Vincent, who was no blood relation, and, therefore, as she said, had no appearances to keep up, nourished this dislike with all her might, and sought on every occasion to place Dick in an unfavourable light before his grandmother's eyes. There was scant difficulty

in this, for stories of Dick's wildness or reports of his lavish extravagance constantly reached her ears, and were repeated with considerable variation and embroidery to the unwillingly listening grandmother. Mr. and Mrs. Vincent contrived, on their part, to extract a good deal of comfort from Grannie; they stayed with her, accompanied by their entire family of eight children, for weeks together, they shot and eat her game, they rode her horses, they made her pay for dear Lottie's doctor, or Tommy's vacation tutor, or Mary's singing lessons; they drove out in her carriage, and paid visits to their friends, and usually arrived, dressed in such shabby clothes, that, from pure shame, Grannie consented to clothe them anew in fashionable garments. At this moment, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent had arrived on a nice long visit. Dick, being aware of this fact, and knowing how grating to his nerves was the proximity of his aunt and uncle, nowise relished the prospect, but comforted himself by the recollection of Bruce's kind and genial society, to which he resolved chiefly to confine himself. "Dick comes to-day," said Mrs. Vincent at breakfast, (Granny was having

hers on a tray in her bedroom, in consequence of her indisposition), “and I understand he brings a friend, a Mr. Bruce; do you know anything of him?”

“I’ve seen him,” replied her husband, plunging into a pheasant-pie and carefully extracting all the truffles he could find, “a seedy looking fellow, rather short-sighted, and can’t shoot.”

“That’s a blessing! then dear Watty can take his place and make the fourth gun.”

“It isn’t necessary for the boys always to shoot.”

“Poor dears! they get little enough of it, and now Dick returns they will get less.”

“They’re welcome to my share at least, for on Thursday I’m going over to Westhorpe to see a little black mare that I am told is a wonder, and Friday I must attend Bignell races.”

“And you will be away nearly every day while Dick is here; well, you *are* a fool!” retorted Mrs Vincent, closing her lips with a sharp click.

“Why, he doesn’t *want me!*” said Mr. Vincent innocently, rolling his blood-shot goggle-eyes round the table.

“ *I* want you; if Dick has his grandmother all to himself he will get anything in the world out of her,” retorted Mrs. Vincent.

“ Oh, bother! I can’t turn amateur detective.”

“ You might at least take a little trouble for the sake of your family.”

“ If that little black mare is as good as they say, she will about win the Liverpool, and I expect to pick up a tenner or two at Bignell races; that is some good to my family isn’t it?” Mr. Vincent sat down and drank off his tea with a satisfied gurgle.

“ You men are all the same, you never look beyond your nose,” snapped his wife.

“ And you women are always nagging; can not a man be master in his own house? I should like to know who is to prevent him from doing as he pleases?”

“ When he pleases to fritter away his money in racing, and gambling, and idle amusements, he is not fit to be master.”

“ Oh, isn’t he? I’ll just show you.” Mr. Vincent rose, and his face grew red while he spluttered, “ Mind your own business, and I’ll mind mine. I’ll trouble you not to interfere in my affairs. I’ll race if I please,

and I will bet if I please, and you are not the person who can stop me. I shall do just as I please, and your duty, madam, is to obey—dy'e hear? to *obey*."

Therewith Mr. Vincent marched out of the room holding his head very high, and passing by the butler's pantry looked in and bethought him to ask for a nip of brandy, fortified by which cordial, he strode round to the stables. Mrs. Vincent, meanwhile, shrugging her shoulders, placidly finished her breakfast, gathered up her letters, and proceeded to Granny's room. A little quarrel with her husband in nowise disturbed the harmony of her married life; she was accustomed to these trifling scenes, which broke the monotony of her humdrum existence and gave her a taste of the excitement which more worldly women find in intrigue or flirtation. Besides, she knew that her husband relied on her judgment and generally followed her advice, and, though she regarded him as a fool, and felt that he must be driven and guided for his own good, occasional kicks and rebellion against bit and bridle only served to solidify her influence and to give her a pleasing sense of power.

Granny's own room was the smallest in the house, a den of some six feet by twelve, but here at least she reigned supreme ; the nook was sacred from intrusion on the part of the young Vincents, and, being chiefly furnished with shabbily-bound books, and littered with business papers, appealed neither to cupidity nor to an æsthetic sense of beauty.

Yet Grannie was very happy here. She was free from Mrs. Vincent's carping meanness, and from Vincent's noisy jokes. She was surrounded by her beloved books, her poets, and her classic authors, for Mrs. Carol, confessing it only shamefacedly and to her intimate friends, was a true student. Shakespeare, Milton, and the lake poets rose to her lips unconsciously, and it would have been difficult to find a quotation which she could not cap, nor quickly name the author. Her education was of the old-fashioned solid order ; she possessed no showy accomplishments beyond a pretty talent for water-colour painting, which she continued to cultivate even with the drawbacks of old age and spectacles ; but everything within the bounds of reason that a cultivated woman ought to know was familiar to her.

She had decided opinions on literature, on art, on politics, and on religion, though a peculiarly bashful and modest reticence made people sometimes think that old Mrs. Carroll was weak and easily led. So much of her life was unselfish, so unassuming were her own personal pleasures, consisting of her garden, her charities, and her books, that the warmth of strong passion and earnest affection that lay buried in her tender heart was almost hidden from the world. People called her a nice intelligent old lady, but few understood that the ordinary run of men and women were scarce worthy to be named with her. Dick alone appreciated her; he had realised something of the wealth of unselfish devotion that formed the keystone of Granny's character, but even he presumed on her kindness and tried her patience severely. Mrs. Carroll looked up somewhat surprised at Mrs. Vincent's knock and almost simultaneous entrance. "What is it?" she said, gently, yet with a tinge of vexation in her quiet voice.

"I am sure I hope I don't disturb you, but I wanted a little talk with you, and I thought Dick would be here directly."

“ I certainly hope he will arrive to-day, but I do not expect him so early,” said clever Granny, undeceived by this transparent pretext.

“ What prospects has he of election ? ” continued Mrs. Vincent, sitting down on a chair whence she calmly ousted a fat dictionary and two volumes of poetry.

“ I believe they are very good.”

“ It is very strange, isn’t it, for so young a man to be elected M.P. for the county, I think Vincent would have been a far more respectable choice,” she continued, smoothing out her apron sedately.

“ I do not know that Vincent wished it, or was asked, and I am very glad for Dick to have an occupation,” said Mrs. Carrol.

“ To be sure, anything is better than that deplorable racing,” said Mrs. Vincent, fixing her beadlike eyes on the old lady, “ and Dick is so *very* fond of the turf.”

“ Young people like excitement. I suppose it is natural enough, but without doubt Dick will steady down ; his wish to get into Parliament proves it.”

“ Really ! Well, now I thought it was Lady Eleanor that had willed it ; she is a

managing woman, I believe, and rules every one connected with her. I only met her once and I thought her most objectionable ; she had a crowd of young men round her, and was dressed splendidly, but dreadfully low-necked. I can't think how Mr. Highview can stand the show and expense."

"He has a large fortune," Mrs. Carrol said, tapping the paper-cutter against her book a little impatiently, but Mrs. Vincent would not take the hint ; she had not yet finished.

"They will get hold of Dick, I suppose. There's nothing like a worldly woman to influence a young man, and Dick is so weak."

Mrs. Carrol did not answer, she was weary of finding excuses.

"Let me see, she has a daughter or a niece or something, hasn't she ? A possible wife for Dick ; how should you like that ?"

"My dear Maria, what is the good of speculating ? As far as I know, matrimony is far from Dick's thoughts, and Lady Eleanor's niece or another would be welcome if she made Dick a good wife."

"I don't suppose he *does* think of marrying ; why it is only a few months ago, if you

remember, that we heard he was in love with Evelyn Bray, the present Lady Fenchurch. It was Mrs. Twitter who told us, you know, when she came to inquire the character of a servant. She thought Evelyn Bray had behaved very badly in the matter."

"My dear, why rake up these things? Lady Fenchurch is a young woman, and we have no right to blacken her character. Mrs. Twitter may have been mistaken."

"Not a bit of it. I have an excellent memory; but I see you are busy, and perhaps my society is unwelcome," she added, viciously. "I only wanted to ask you if you could spare me that little bit of chinchilla trimming you promised for dear Mary's cloak; the poor child really has not a winter wrap, and it makes me wretched to see her. If you could spare it now, and you're quite sure you won't miss it ——"

Mrs. Carrol, without answering, rose and opened the door of her bedroom.

"Never mind ringing for Cox, Granny; I know where she keeps your furs, and I can easily get it without troubling any one—do you hear?—any one."

But Mrs. Carrol was firm; she rang for

the maid, who in high dudgeon found and silently handed over the fur, feeling, as she expressed it, “ downright sorry that her mistress was stripping herself of everything at the bidding of that hateful Mrs. Vincent.”

“ And now if that is all, Maria, I think I will go on with my letters,” quietly remarked Granny, “ lest Dick should come before I have finished.”

Mrs. Vincent, forced to content herself with this dismissal, snatched up the chinchilla, and, murmuring hurried thanks, retired to her own room to consult Mary about her mantle.

Mrs. Carrol gave a faint sigh when she was left alone, and glanced a little hopelessly round her book-shelves ; the society of those near and dear to one was certainly trying ; yet she felt she had much to be thankful for ; and, plunging again into the consideration of her household books, she endeavoured to forget her daughter-in law’s unwelcome intrusion, and to attribute her behaviour to want of thought rather than want of heart, for was not Mrs. Vincent actuated by the most creditable mother’s love ? So easy is it for the pure in heart to see good in everything.

CHAPTER XII.

IN due time Dick and his friend arrived at Long Leam, having driven over sixteen miles in a dog-cart. Dick greeted his grandmother most affectionately, but the welcome his aunt gave him was tinged with exceeding frigidity. However, he bore it well, laughed and joked, inquired after his uncle, and complimented Granny on her hothouse flowers.

“The chrysanthemums have not been quite as fine as usual,” said Granny, flattered at his remembering her pet hobby, “and Smith has been rather depressed, but I really think on the whole we did as well as our neighbours.”

“Gardens cost a dreadful quantity of money,” said Mrs. Vincent, impressively.

Granny, who fancied this an allusion to her expenditure, hastened to add, “I only keep up the gardens just as they were in my dear husband’s time. He wished it to

be so, and the fern-house I put up last year was built with my pin-money."

"Of course, of course, dear Granny, we all know how fond you are of your garden, and we should none of us wish you to give up anything you really liked, but I was only saying that these amusements are dreadfully expensive, and particularly now when there is so much poverty everywhere, and hundreds of people starving. You should just read the report I got from our district visitor yesterday. We live in Marylebone, you know—such a poor parish—it makes one wonder whether it is *quite* right to spend so much on oneself ——"

Granny flushed a little. Mrs. Vincent's words seemed to accuse her of selfishness. "Perhaps," she said, a little hastily, "I dare say you are right, Maria; but now tell me, Dick, have you lunched?"

"Yes, thank you, Granny; we eat some cold beef and pickles just before starting, and have scarcely got up an appetite since."

Bruce, who, when the ceremony of presentation was over, felt himself a little isolated in the family circle, now wandered round the room examining the book-shelves.

Presently he approached Mrs. Carrol, and said, "You have some fine old books here, I see; if you will permit me I should like to take a look at some of them to-morrow —"

"Delighted, indeed, Mr. Bruce," said Mrs. Carrol, enchanted to find a sympathetic book-lover, "I will show you where the rarest are. We have a fine old edition of Montaigne, and some manuscripts of the sixteenth century, if you care for such things." She drew from her pocket the key of the book-case, and presently Bruce and she were happily bending their heads and trying their eyes over musty folios, and discussing type and editions to their heart's content. Dick stood by the window whistling low. Mrs. Vincent approached him. "Is it true," she said, "that Lady Eleanor's niece will inherit her uncle's fortune?"

"I really don't know," answered Dick, wondering on what pretext he could make his escape.

"But what is she like—I am told she is very plain?"

"She—who? Oh, I beg your pardon, yes. I never thought about it. I suppose Miss Windermere is plain, but she is very nice."

“That Miss Hardfast was there too, was not she? Not married yet, I suppose. Ah, well, she was a fast; bold girl, and how she and her mother contrive to live on the pittance they have, I am sure I can’t think—there are some queer stories afloat about them. People call them the ‘birds of prey,’ you know.”

“She is my cousin,” said Dick, angrily.

“Of course, yes, in a distant way; let me see, your mother was a sister of Mr. Hardfast—that’s scarcely much of a relationship—the Hardfasts were nobodies; but Mrs. Hardfast was worse than a nobody, she was a garrison belle.”

Dick was about to reply, in terms anything but complimentary, to his aunt’s observations, when the door opened and Vincent Carrol entered noisily. “Ah, Dick, my boy, delighted to see you; drove over, did you? shocking bad road, ain’t it? stones all the way; doesn’t matter though in a hired trap. Well, and how goes it?—you look pretty fit.” Mr. Vincent did not stop for Dick’s answer, but proceeded, following his mother to the bookshelves, “Mother, that coachman of yours is a fool; he has lamed

the bay mare, and got the grey so fat he can scarcely go at all. I gave him a bit of my mind to-day ; all ladies' coachmen are the same ; they don't understand their business, but they know they're safe, because their mistresses are so confoundedly ignorant. Have you been round to the stables yet, Dick ? No ? then you just come along with me. I have got a new pointer to show you —a beauty.” Dick, who infinitely preferred his uncle to his aunt, the coarse selfishness of the one, being at least frank and unaffected, while the secret cunning and intrigue of the other stung like a serpent in the dark, accepted the offer gratefully, and without compunction left Bruce to entertain his grandmother.

“ A very pleasant young man—exceptionally well-informed,” Granny confided at a later period to Dick ; while Bruce, who knew nothing about dogs, and cared less for horseflesh, continued to explain recondite allusions and interpret Greek quotations in her favourite books, never even discovering that Mrs. Vincent prowled round, furious at the interest Mrs. Carrol was taking in her visitor, and vainly trying to pick up

intelligible scraps of the conversation in order that she might find a pretext for interrupting the fascinating *tête-à-tête*. All that afternoon Vincent and his nephew strolled about the stables and the kennel and the farm, ending with a trudge across some stubble-fields to have a look at a colt in Farmer Rogers's paddock. Vincent, who did not care who his companion was provided he could smoke and talk about horses, made himself exceedingly agreeable to his nephew, told him he was delighted at the prospect of his election, and wasn't a bit envious, no, not he ! finally confided to him his intention of buying the black mare, in order to win the Liverpool, and the difficulty that stood in the way of his carrying out this project. "The fact is, my dear boy," he said, staring glassily out of his codfish eyes, "the fellow wants 800*l.* for the mare; it's dirt cheap; she's worth it, every bit of the money, but it's a deuce of a lot, and just now with Christmas coming on, you know, and a lot of bills, I am a little pressed for money; but if I don't decide at once (I've got the refusal of the mare) she will be sold to another man who is sweet upon her; it would be a thou-

sand pities, for she's certain to win, and—that's how it is."

"It would be a great pity," said Dick, thinking of something else.

"Now, my dear boy, if *you* would advance me the money, you should go halves in the profits —"

"But I haven't the money —"

"That does not signify—my mother will give it you, if you ask her; she is devoted to you, as we all know."

"I don't think I should like to ask her, she disapproves of racing —"

"Well, don't tell her what the money's for. Say it's election business, or that you have run into debt—or something; you've got brains—you'll know what to say."

"It is rather difficult," muttered Dick.

"The thing is a certainty; I know there is nothing can beat that mare, and we can hedge the bet and stand several thousands to nothing."

"I don't care so much about the money, but I should like the *kudos* of winning the Liverpool."

"So would everybody—then it is settled; you must get the money and I'll buy the

mare and take all the trouble off your hands —it is a safe investment you will see, only trust to me."

Dick did not quite like it. He hated telling his grandmother a lie, and he knew she objected to racing; on the other hand he was fired with the ambition to become a hero in the sporting world, and the thing was an excitement in itself; besides, his uncle Vincent was a first-rate judge of horse-flesh, and not likely to make a mistake. So he parted from his uncle promising to give him the money if he could obtain it.

The month of November had been specially fine. Glorious sunsets were succeeded by bright clear mornings, and to breathe the bracing air became a pleasure. It was Mrs. Carroll's habit whenever the weather permitted, to walk up and down the terraces and visit her hothouses every morning for an hour. Dick offered her his arm, and the good lady, counting herself fortunate to possess so attentive a grandson, spent some happy moments parading in the genial sunshine, leaning on her stalwart grandson's arm, and pointing out to him the merits of tree and shrub. It was during one of these

airings that Dick propounded to her his request for 800*l.*

“Eight hundred pounds!” she said, stopping short in her walk and looking hard at Dick, who had some ado to keep from blushing; “it is a large sum.”

“Yes, it is,” he sheepishly confessed.

“And what are you going to do with it?”

“Well, you see —” This was the difficult moment; he could not say, “I am going to buy a racehorse;” and like many a better man he prevaricated, regardless of possible consequences.

“Well, you see, Granny, there are a lot of expenses for this election.”

“Send me in your bill, Dick, and I will pay it.”

“Yes; but there are trifles which cannot be included in an election bill.”

“Eight hundred pounds is scarcely a trifle!”

“No; but college was so expensive, I have a few debts I should like to settle. Hang it, Granny, I want the money, and I must have it; please don’t ask me any more questions.”

The old lady took her grandson’s arm again and proceeded a little way in silence.

“Dick,” she said at last, “I trust you—if you require this money you shall have it; only be careful, dear; I am not *very* well able to spend just now, and perhaps the garden is expensive, and I ought to retrench; you know that I wish to do all that is right towards you, you are my heir, this place will be yours.” She waved her hand towards the terrace and the old yew hedges and the mere. “I wish to leave you everything intact; it is a fine property, Dick, a fine property, but we must not be extravagant.”

“You are very kind, Granny.” Dick’s head sank a little; he pushed with his stick at some weeds in the path.

“I should like to put by something, Dick, first for your uncle—he is not rich and has a large family, and then for you—you will marry a wife some day, and she will be young and gay, and find this house old-fashioned, and wish for new furniture and pretty things.”

“Long Leam is beautiful; we shall be quite satisfied,” Dick said, deprecatingly.

“Yes, my dear, Long Leam *is* beautiful, and it suits an old woman like me; it re-

minds me of my girlhood, and I prefer to see everything about me that has grown old with me ; but young people are different—she will want low arm-chairs and feather screens, and frippery and new carpets, and all that. You shall give them to her, Dick ; but I must save the money for it, and so please do not mind if I say we must not be extravagant.”

She smiled one of the gentle spiritual smiles, which made you think her soul was already in heaven, and that the earthly smile was only the reflection of divine glory, and Dick hung his head lower, shamed by her goodness, speechless in his confusion.

“ But you shall have the money, dear ; I was going to do up the conservatory, and get some new vines, and have some fresh hot-water pipes put in, but all that can wait, and if you will come to my room presently I will give you the cheque.”

Dick did not answer, but he took the dear old lady’s hand with its mittens, and the quaint antique filagree gold rings set in garnets and emeralds on her fingers, and, lifting it to his lips, kissed it reverently. Here, at least, was true nobility, a heart

that gave lavishly, generously, and exacted nothing in return. Nothing? Why, it extorted respect, and gained love—the bargain was surely a fair one.

When Dick handed over the cheque to his uncle, he could not help saying, with a gravity somewhat foreign to his nature, “ You are quite sure we are making a good purchase?—you know I couldn’t bear Granny’s money to be wasted.”

“ Wasted! bless you, there isn’t a chance of it; why the money is as safe as in the funds. I’ll go this very day and close the sale, and telegraph to Tommy Lightheart that he is to ride her. With such a mare, and such a jockey, we are as safe as a church.”

Long Leam was as dull as ever, but Dick was so attentive to his grandmother, and so anxious to shoot her coverts as she wished, and to be civil to the neighbours she invited to make up the number of the guns, and so ready to carry her knitting, or put on her shawl, or convey her orders to the gardener, that he had not time to think of being bored. In the evenings he and Bruce held endless smoking parliaments in Dick’s room (which

being at the end of a long passage, and shut off by a baize door, he was permitted to pollute with tobacco), and settled the affairs of the nation ; but though Dick discoursed freely of politics and pleasure he carefully, as by some special instinct, refrained from mentioning his purchase of the black mare, or his hopes of winning the Liverpool ; and if by chance his uncle began the subject of racing in Bruce's presence he would turn the conversation and say, "You know, uncle, Julian is not a sporting character, so all this talk is only Greek to him ; get him upon politics, and see if he doesn't find something interesting to tell us."

Thus even Bruce, his Fidus Achates, did not know the deepest depths of Dick's soul, nor suspect what a multitude of various interests occupied his mind.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE black mare was bought and the jockey duly engaged, and all promised well for the success of Mr. Vincent's project. Unfortunately the public had also got wind of the mare's excellence, so that the price he was able to obtain about her was not nearly so advantageous as he had hoped; still this served but to confirm his good opinion of the purchase, and he comforted himself with the thought that a little later on they would be able to hedge their money. But Dick could not dally for ever by an old lady's chair; the election agent clamoured for his return, and Mr. Highview claimed his promise of another visit. So after a few days he took a tender farewell of his grandmother; his heart smote him and he kissed her more fondly than usual; and, leaving Mr. and Mrs.

Vincent to bear her company, returned to Highview Castle. Most of the company had departed, and only Maud Hardfast, who, having lost Arthur Sterney, was sadly at a loss for amusement, remained behind to welcome him. The most constant of men weary of overmuch affection; and Dick, who was used to Maud's beauty, and began to see through some of her artifices (especially since she had played him off against Arthur Sterney), found her attentions somewhat overpowering. As his aunt Vincent once truly observed, after all Maud was scarcely a relation, and to be seen constantly in her presence, and eternally hanging over and monopolised by her, might lead to complications. He had not the smallest intention of marrying her, he was not even in love with her. She possessed no money, and a good many doubtful relations; and to undertake the responsibility of matrimony was far enough from his thoughts. But he was perfectly aware of the power of gossip, and he decided that it would be advisable to display interest in some one else in order to disarm suspicion. For this purpose Luce presented herself most opportunely. She

was plain and unassuming, and no one could suppose her to be attractive to a gay young man, so that his attentions could only be interpreted to mean civility. Thus it happened that Dick found himself often by Luce's side, that he took her in to dinner whenever he had the chance, and that he would turn over the leaves of her music-book, or wind a skein of worsted for her if she desired it. Lady Eleanor watched these indications of a rising attachment with pleasure, but Maud turned sick with annoyance, and almost fell ill from worry.

“You little sly minx!” she said, attacking Luce one day in the corridor. “How dared you say you didn't care to speak to Mr. Carrol, and that you would do your best to help me, when you know you're always with him now, and scarcely let me get a word in edgeways. I hate girls who are humbugs and hypocrites, and you did pretend to be superior to love and marriage.”

“So I am,” said Luce, quietly. “Mr. Carrol does not love me, but if he pleases to talk to me a little, and I find his company agreeable, I don't see why I should not per-

mit it. He will not marry you the sooner because he does not talk to me."

"Of course he will. You're trying to spoil my plans, you know you are—you nasty venomous little reptile."

"Don't be angry, Maud; I can't help it. I don't know what is the reason, but I am sure Mr. Carrol avoids you."

"And, if it is so, I know the reason: your own flirtation (and really, for a new hand, you're not at all bad) is the cause of it. I did not think you could be so mean, so ungenerous."

Here Maud pulled out her pocket-handkerchief and pretended to cry—perhaps she really did shed a few tears—for wounded vanity suffers nearly as much as love.

"Dear Maud!" Luce put her arms round her neck and kissed her affectionately; "don't cry. I promise not to speak to Mr. Carrol to-day, at least not if I can help it."

"Mind, now, you remember your promise." Maud put away her handkerchief and smiled again graciously. "Remember—not one word."

"I said if I could help it," added Luce, as she passed quickly on. She had given the

promise in a fit of generosity, but Mr. Carrol's own action might absolve her. If he sought her out, if he came and sat by her as usual, she could not turn her back, or be *ancivil*. No; in that case she *must* speak to him. In all honesty, however, she tried to render this less likely. Dick had been away all day canvassing, and he only returned in time for dinner. His place was next Lady Eleanor, and Luce at the other end of the table had no chance of sharing in their conversation. After dinner she chose a position between Mrs. Hardfast's portly person and a large table, on which were scattered books of photographs of Florence and Rome. One of these she seized, and made a pretence of being deeply absorbed. When the gentlemen came in she would not look up—for aught she knew there might be magnetism in her eye—but kept her head carefully bent over the photographs.

Some moments of breathless waiting elapsed before she heard a voice at her elbow say: “What is engrossing you so to-night?”

Her heart leapt. He had found her out. He had come to her without any finessing or

assistance on her part. She was absolved from her promise, and he liked to talk to her.

These varied emotions lent a sparkle to her eye and a colour to her cheek. "She is really not so *very* plain," thought Dick, as he drew a chair near and sat down.

"I can't talk to you with that great table between us. I never knew you were so fond of photographs before."

"I am not particularly fond of photographs."

"Then why are you looking at them?"

"That is my secret," said Luce with a smile.

"I think you mean mischief; do come away from behind the table and let us sit on that sofa, it will be ever so much more comfortable."

"You shouldn't talk to me," said poor Luce, abruptly. She understood nothing whatever of diplomacy or she would have managed better. "Why don't you talk to Maud? She is sitting all alone, and has not even any photographs to look at."

"So she is," said Dick, quietly, stretching himself more comfortably, "sitting all alone;

well that must make quite a pleasant variety for her, she is generally surrounded by all the men in the room."

"And she only cares for one."

"Do you mean me to be fatuous, and apply your observation?"

"If you like."

"Then I will not. I am sorry to disappoint any young lady, but Maud must sit alone to-night."

"It is hard upon her," gently urged Luce.

"Why hard? She is nothing to me."

"No! I thought —"

"Whatever you thought, forget, please, from this moment. Maud is my cousin, a very pretty, nice, lively girl, but nothing more, and never will be."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure. You are the last person who ought to doubt me."

"Why?"

"Why, because for the last day or two I have devoted my time chiefly to you."

Luce coloured painfully. She understood. He could talk to her because she did not count, it could not signify. Her expressive

face told a tale. He saw he had wounded her.

“What is it? What have I said, Miss Windermere?”

“Nothing, Mr. Carrol; nothing, at least, that I mind.”

“But I must have done wrong. I am sure I am very sorry.”

“See, my aunt is making me a sign; we are going to have some music.” Luce rose hastily and threaded her way quickly across the room.

Dick sat on, sulky and alone, refusing to stir. What a perverse world it was to be sure; if a man felt himself comfortable in a girl’s presence ten to one something happened to separate them. No indeed, Luce was certainly not plain, she had fine eyes and the prettiest way of looking interested in all you said, which was not without charm, and she never wanted to talk about herself, or to be paid compliments. Presently Dick, bored with the music, and determined to avoid Maud, slunk out of the room and retired to enjoy a lonely pipe. Luce missed him and sang badly in consequence. What was the matter? Had she offended him?

She said to herself that no promises, no feeling of loyalty, should tempt her to be cold to him to-morrow. Maud must be mistaken, he would never marry her. That evening, Luce, sitting in her bed-room, her brown hair streaming over her shoulders, and two big serious eyes staring at her own reflection in the looking-glass, had an air of extreme youthfulness that became her exceedingly. So thought even Lady Eleanor, who just then walked in. Luce started.

“What are you doing there, child? How late you are sitting up! Has Devon left you?”

“Oh, yes, aunt,” said Luce, hastily twisting up her hair; “I shall be ready, directly, I was only —”

“Only wool-gathering, as usual,” observed Lady Eleanor, seating herself on the edge of the bed; “when will you give up that bad habit? However, I must say I think you are improved; you are more sociable and seem to get on nicely with Mr. Carrol. What has he said to you?”

“We spoke of the election, and he told me about his grandmother —”

“Rubbish! I mean has he said—well, anything really marked?”

“No, aunt, he has said nothing, he means nothing; he prefers Maud to me. Oh, why can one *never* speak to a man without some hateful after-thought of intentions spoiling all?”

“Luce, my dear, you forget yourself,” said Lady Eleanor, severely; “and as to Maud Hardfast, if I thought her presence interfered with your prospects I should turn her out of the house to-morrow.”

“No, she does not interfere,” said poor Luce incoherently, anxious to avert her aunt’s wrath from Maud, “but the fact is, there is nothing at all to speak about.”

“Then there *ought* to be. Mr. Carrol is a very eligible person; he has seemed to take an interest in you, has shared your rides, and apparently enjoys the same tastes; under these circumstances, unless a girl is a fool, she ought to know whether a man means anything.”

“But he does not. Oh, aunt, do not say such things!” One glance at Luce’s distressed countenance impressed Lady Eleanor with the truth of this statement. She relaxed her

severity a little, and rose majestically, “Luce, I believe,” she said, as she neared the door, “I do believe you have your fate in your own hands; let me beg of you not to throw it away recklessly, or, from any foolish scruples about other silly girls, render yourself distasteful to the man who may possibly offer you a happy home and true affection.” Lady Eleanor usually talked a great deal about true affection and the domesticities; she did not practise them much herself, but the words sounded well, and imposed upon her hearers. When Lady Eleanor’s stately footsteps ceased to echo down the passage, and Luce once more felt certain she was alone, she quickly put out her candle and threw herself down by the bedside in her white dressing-gown; and then in the darkness and the silence she let her tears flow quietly, and her heart breathe out its secret. “For I *do* love him,” she whispered to the solitude of night. “I *do* love him; he will never love me; he is nothing to me, he is so handsome, and so clever, and so happy, but still I love him;” and the little figure crouched on thus in the dark and the loneliness, and the unsatisfied love with which

her gentle soul was overflowing vented itself in sobs and sighs. Lady Eleanor had trampled cruelly on her most cherished feelings; but then Lady Eleanor did not know—the affection and domesticities of which she spoke comprised none of the keen and exquisite agony which Luce experienced. Luce, who—proud, reserved, foolish little creature—had given the devotion of her heart to a man who had scarce passed three weeks in her company. It was illogical, it was unlikely, it was far from reasonable, and yet Luce could not help it. In her lonely childhood, and her stunted girlhood, she had accumulated a volume of feeling, which now spent itself on so ordinary a personage as young Dick Carrol. For when we love we do not account the object so much as our own capacity for loving. Love works miracles; it makes the plain girls pretty, the dull men bright; it transports the elastic soul into regions of light and liberty, where it can roam freely, and irradiate the very commonplaces of life with the ardent lava-stream that consumes it. To love, all things are possible, for everything is a miracle. Luce loved, and in her madness reckoned herself the most fortunate of mortals.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR some days subsequently Luce was very still and silent, her eyes were red-rimmed, and her sad appearance attracted Lady Eleanor's notice, drawing down upon her a torrent of reproaches. It also attracted Maud's attention, but it drew no reproaches from her.

“Poor Luce!” she would say, caressingly, “why do you vex yourself? All men are the same; it is here to-day and there to-morrow, with them; they were not created for constancy, and it is useless to expect it of them.”

“I expect nothing,” Luce answered, indifferently.

“Oh, yes, you do. You expect a great deal more than I have ever asked of men. You give yourself no trouble, you take no

pains to be pleasant, in fact you rather avoid them ; you would not even be content with an offer of marriage, but you want love."

"Yes. I want love," said Luce.

"I declare you are quite indelicate ; love is not in fashion ; there are of course such things as passion and madness ; we hear of them in poetry and on the stage ; but who, in the name of goodness, wants love in ordinary life ? Why, it would be quite out of place, like soup at breakfast. You are so unpractical."

"Have not all the best things in life been done by unpractical people ? All the reforms, all the inventions, all the literature—the authors of such things were always called unpractical because they lived on a higher, a heroic, plane of life."

"Well, we are not inventors, and I'm sure I don't wish to be heroic. We are only two commonplace girls, and our business is to do the best we can for ourselves. For my part, if Dick sheers off now I shall marry Arthur Sterney, debts and duns and all, and try if I can't keep him in order." Therewith she danced off to a mirror, posed herself, ruffled up her golden fringe a bit, humming a valse

tune to herself as she did so, and finally returned to where Luce sat, book in hand, by the fire.

“Seriously, Luce, what are you aiming at?”

“I have already told you—at nothing. Why should one always have some scheme on hand?”

“Why? because it’s human nature. Mamma always schemed and I’ve inherited the faculty. Ever since I can remember I have always played a part. When I was a little girl, and came down to the drawing-room in short frocks and pink ribbons, Mamma used to say to me, ‘Now mind, Maud, you behave nicely, and look pretty, or I don’t know what so-and-so will think of you.’ I have gone on behaving nicely and looking pretty ever since.”

“It must be very fatiguing.”

“Not a bit; habit is second nature.”

“A very unpleasant second nature, I should think. Shall you give up scheming when you are married?”

“Certainly not. I shall want other things then; it is only the stupid sheeplike women who sit down patiently and ask for nothing.

You're one of those ruminating creatures, Luce, and will never get your own way in anything."

This was precisely what Luce said to herself. She chid herself for foolish fancies and happy day-dreams. She repeated to herself over and over again that she was plain, and that nobody could love her; that Dick only amused himself with her from *désœuvrement*, and that he would soon go away, and she would probably never see him again. And yet, though she sought by every means in her power to wrap herself in a mantle of chilly stoicism, she could not help it that his voice brought the blood into her cheeks, nor that his step set her heart beating. No one could say that Dick's notice of her was anything but friendly and undemonstrative, and just what was fitting to be paid to the adopted daughter of his host, and yet Luce felt that their intercourse was on a different footing from ordinary acquaintance. Dick talked to her as to a trusted friend; as to one in whose presence he need not be constrained, and one who asked truth rather than pretty speeches. He knew she was neither mercenary nor intriguing, and the

sense of rest conveyed to him in this conviction, served to render the companionship doubly agreeable to a man who had never known the frank and loving comradeship of a sister. He found himself telling her things that he had breathed to no living soul except Bruce ; asking her advice, speaking of his thoughts, his wishes, his illusions. She knew all about his grandmother, and the teasing reproaches of his aunt Vincent, and the Gargantuan propensities of his uncle Vincent ; she knew the names of his dogs, how many rats Vic could kill, and the prizes Gip took, and the age of the old hunter who had carried him so well at college, and the history of the pictures and the prints at Long Leam. And Luce was never tired of listening. Accustomed to the gaudy and lavish splendour of Highview Castle, the description of grannie, with her old-fashioned gentle ways, her white-haired retainers, and her clockwork establishment, charmed her fancy and interested her imagination.

“ You must let me see your grannie,” she said one day, impulsively. “ I have never known of any one resembling her. She is like an old châtelaine in a fairy tale.”

“She is just like one,” Dick answered, “and I love her dearly, kind old thing; but you would perhaps find her antiquated.”

“Not I; my aunt might, but I like what is old. Things are too new to please me here,” she answered, decidedly.

Dick, who in his heart of hearts was proud of the fine old lady, smiled, and promised to arrange an interview between them. These conversations usually took place in the evening, for Dick’s electioneering business took up most of his time; and thanks to Mr. Highview’s matter-of-fact energy and Bruce’s enthusiasm he was never allowed to grow slack for an instant. Dick was beginning to take a real interest in politics. Under such able tuition as that of his friend Bruce this was not surprising, for his political views tinged every thought of Bruce’s mind.

“If politics do not mean everything to a man,” the latter would say, “they must mean nothing; for politics rightly considered comprise every question of social and moral importance. The family is a part of the state, and the state includes the general well-being of humanity. If the motive power of parties be self-interest the decadence of a nation

cannot be far off, and is a mere matter of time ; therefore, purity of election, universal suffrage, and worthy candidates, are the three chief ends to be desired. When you have educated the masses and given them freedom of citizenship, you are likely to arrive at some concensus which will represent the broadest and fairest level of thought."

Dick could not go quite so far as this ; he, like Mr. Highview, preferred to wait and let wants shape themselves rather than dictate what form they should take. He believed in a doctrine of atoms, that affinity would attract and crystallize into the most suitable forms. He thought things tolerably satisfactory as they were, and, that unless distinct pressure were brought to bear upon the prejudices and customs of society, it was unnecessary to excite class feeling and party spite. He wished to do what was right, but, as he did not see his way clearly to what *was* right, he preferred a passive and doubtful attitude. The variety of problems that presented themselves, their various discordant elements, the contradictions that arrested his footsteps and troubled his mind, all puzzled while they interested him. He had no idea

that to be a Member of Parliament implied such responsibilities, such a perpetual making up one's mind, such constant and seemingly important decisions. He began to be afraid that he should be a useless member of the House ; and felt helpless and irresolute. Hitherto he had supposed that to take one's place creditably in Parliamentary life it needed only good health, stentorian lungs, a habit of sitting up late, and an announcement which placarded one amongst one's friends as a Liberal or a Tory. Now, he found that honesty was not always expediency, and that if you agreed to one proposition it did not follow as a corollary that you agreed to a dozen others. Occasionally he felt himself drawn towards a conservative creed, especially if the question touched upon personal matters, such as payment of rents, or landlord's privileges, or the game-laws ; at other times he boldly espoused radical principles, and accused the Tories of blindness, stupidity, and retrograde opinions.

“ Now you see, my dear boy,” Mr. Highview dinned into his ears, “ you can't work on independent lines ; it don't pay ; first belong to a party, then stick to it. You'll

find it the only advisable thing in the long-run. Never make yourself peculiar, for then every one is your enemy, but do as others —abide by a common-place standard, and you'll find all men your friends. Eccentricity implies superiority, at least in your own mind, and superiority rubs up every one's back. A man can afford to forgive ; he cannot bear to envy. Your friend Bruce, though he is very clever, and I am sure a most well-meaning person, is an enthusiast, and will never be successful. Success in life means ordinary capacities, with an extraordinary power of using them. Now, Bruce theorizes splendidly, but in practice his scruples will always impede any real progress. He will never trample on the weak, and to do much good you must be capable of doing a little evil."

Between such contradictory exhortations Dick performed his canvassing, and attained at last to a very fair measure of the golden mean. He promised easily enough, knowing that it was not in his power to perform, but, judging that hope is a great factor in happiness ; he listened to grievances *cum grano*, and felt that there was a great deal to be

said on both sides. He raged against his opponents, comforting his conscience by the knowledge that they raged against him, and he thus secured a hearty following and appreciative audiences. Sir Hilary Fenchurch, on his part, had wasted no time; he was of a good old stock, a sportsman, a generous landlord, and a tried man of business. Lady Fenchurch's fair face, though she said little, and only smiled sweetly, had been of considerable assistance in his visits to farmers' wives, who were supposed to influence their husbands, and he spoke in a fluent, careful fashion, with a sense of conviction and a mode of placing further appeal out of the question, that carried away his hearers. The fight promised to be a close one. Every nerve was strained by rival agents; every argument used by the respective candidates. The instant one announced a full and enthusiastic meeting, the other followed suit by holding a monster gathering of the electors; did one hoist a squib or a cartoon, the other immediately invented something more sharp and stinging.

Hitherto, however, these attacks, though rude and personal, had attained but little

importance, for Sir Hilary was a gentleman above reproach, and Dick was a young and untried man. It was hard to get hold of truth or satire that would really wound and rankle in them. Dick began to feel happy; the sense of power gratified him, and existence at Highview was the most luxurious possible. Not a trifling or a fashionable caprice but could there be immediately gratified; the hothouses were regal, whenever he wished it a gardenia adorned his buttonhole, while mountains of pines and grapes made their appearance every day at dessert; horses and carriages existed in profusion, and even a quiet library was set apart for Bruce's good pleasure. To the latter the place seemed a kind of Capua, whose charms would entice the strongest; each day he declared he must really return to his work and his London lodging, and each day Dick prevailed upon him to grant further delay.

Julian consented easily enough, for when he was not engaged canvassing no one troubled their head about him, and he was as much buried among his books as in his own home. Towards dusk he might be met, a tall figure in flap hat and grey overcoat,

striding along with head bent down and hands clasped behind his back. Asked what he had seen when on one of these rapid pedestrian tours he would answer "Nothing." How nothing? Then Julian confessed that he believed it was a cold day or a bright day, but that really he could not be sure, nor remember where he had walked (he usually took the same constitutional, two miles out and two miles in along the turnpike road), for he had been busy running over in his mind some arguments in favour of socialism, or grappling with an abstruse question of feudal law. Once Luce took him out for a walk; she showed him her favourite flowers, and pointed out some lovely tints of the late autumnal foliage, and the effect of chequered gleams of sunshine under the avenue trees. He opened his mild eyes, and looked where he was desired, and said it "was very pretty, indeed quite remarkable, an optic illusion he supposed," until Luce burst out laughing, and, seeing his meditative gaze fixed upon her face, said, "I suppose you don't know the difference between a woman and the Elgin marbles, or the muddy London streets and a

cowslip meadow, Mr. Bruce, if you always wander about with your eyes shut."

"Excuse me, Miss Windermere, I am afraid I have been rude; but the fact is I have never yet had time to observe the beauties of nature, and Greek manuscripts have injured my sight. When I was at Cambridge I only walked from necessity, and generally with a book in my hand; some day when I have leisure I must do a course of sunsets."

"And sunrises; it will be so good for your health."

Bruce considered Luce a very agreeable young lady, a fact which he gave her to understand in some clumsy Homeric fashion; nineteenth-century young ladies not having yet come within the orbit of his vision, and his mother, a prim be-capped widow, being the latest manifestation of womanhood to which he had bent his attention. Yet, as has been said, he owned a kind of distant ideal cult for women, and in his heart treasured the notion that some day, when he had leisure, he should taste love; but the period at which he would allow himself such an epicurean excess was hid in a far-off distant

future. Meanwhile, he was content with books. Lady Eleanor honestly despised him ; he was not a man, but a mole, she declared ; and, as for being young and a contemporary of Dick's, she believed him rather to be a dug-up centenarian, a kind of resuscitated toad-in-the-hole. She tolerated him on Dick's account and because he was quiet and inoffensive, but declined taking any trouble about him or casting him a thought, except when she saw a mark of muddy boots on the carpet, or discovered a trace of cigar-ash on the library table-cloth, and his presence obtruded itself on her mind. Maud had at first set her cap at him, as she did at all men, but finding that he never looked at her, and only responded to her advances by a few precise speeches, she soon gave him up as ineligible, and he was left to solitude and the tender mercies of kind-hearted Luce, who liked him for many reasons. First, because he was shy and quiet ; next, because he was poor and unpopular ; and thirdly, because he was Dick's friend ; the latter, the most potent reason of all. The days slipped by and Christmas was approaching. Dick intended to spend it at his grandmother's, and Bruce

among his books in London. The moment of parting, to which Luce looked forward with silent terror, rapidly approached. Dick was kind and friendly and cool as usual ; he had not said one word that would lead her to think he cared for her, but he had promised her an invitation to Long Leam, and on that anticipation she now lived. The day before his departure was wild and snowy. “Seasonable weather,” as some stout elderly people are fond of remarking ; “shrivelling weather,” as Luce said, who was of a chilly constitution. Dick had returned, cold and miserable, from a drive in the dog-cart, along the slippery snow-covered roads, and was gone to his room to change his wet clothes. Maud in the billiard-room practised difficult strokes by herself ; Lady Eleanor and Mrs. Hardfast were closeted in the latter’s *boudoir*, and the morning-room was empty, save for Luce, who, curled up by the fire, sat gazing into the red embers. The last month had been the happiest of her life, and now it was over, gone like everything else, a mere shred of time, ragged and unfinished. Nature, heedless in her impassive calm, leaves much

unfinished work, patches here, and rents there, and hearts torn asunder, and loves parted, and hopes raised but to be dashed to pieces. What becomes of all the unfinished lives, of those who have missed their meaning, of those who die young, standing crowned with flowers, gay and confident on the threshold of existence, of the mother love rudely snapped with the frail baby's wasting breath, of the genius whose unfolded wings, soaring to heaven, wax feeble and sink into the jaws of death, of the songs unsung, and the loves unloved, and all the mystery and pain of earth? Are they lived again, or does the book close at the turned-down page, just as the interest is most keen, the picture most vivid?

Luce sat and wondered. Presently the door opened and Bruce stole in, absent, gentle, noiseless as usual.

"I am alone," said Luce, in a low voice, from the fireplace, "I don't know where all the others have gone to."

"What a bright fire!" said Bruce warming his thin white hands at the blaze. "The fire-worshippers were not far wrong, for

warmth is the medicine, if not the source, of life, and the best gift of the gods."

"Yes, I feel that too in the sunshine, how glorious it is ! sometimes the mere exhilaration it gives becomes pleasure."

"You are sensitive," said Bruce, seating himself ; "that is a dangerous temperament."

"We cannot help our temperament, can we?" asked Luce, with a tiny laugh. "Don't you think the paper on the nursery walls, or the songs with which our nurses hush us to sleep, are answerable for a good deal ? "

"No doubt. Early association is far more important than any one supposes, but the philosophical mind endeavours to rise superior to temperament."

"Women are not superior beings, so I suppose that does not apply to us," she said.

"In some measure of course it does. We are all free beings."

"Are we ? I often doubt it. Who is free ? You are, perhaps, and Mr. Carrol, but I am not free."

"You can preserve your own individuality. That is every one's duty."

"I suppose it is," Luce sighed.

"Of course we are influenced because we

are human beings, but so long as we do not merge our *ego* we are safe.”

“ Do you call being in love merging one’s individuality ? ” asked Luce, shading her eyes from the fire, which vividly lighted up Bruce’s long earnest face.

“ No, for love is right and natural; we love the good qualities of another, we need not adopt his bad ones ; we have strength to see where the right course lies and to pursue our better judgment, even though we love.”

“ I think if I loved I should be weak.”

“ I am sure you would not, for you have a great deal of character. That yielding up one’s convictions is weakness, not love. All this applies to friendship as well, for where there is no respect there can be no friendship.”

“ You respect Mr. Carrol,” she asked.

“ Of course, or he would not be my friend.”

“ You are a stoic, Mr. Bruce; I could never be so strong as that.”

Julian smiled.

“ I think I set a right value on friendship, that is all. I could not lie or steal or cheat to oblige my dearest friend.”

“ But you would stand by him, even if he did some of these things ? ”

“ I really cannot tell, I don’t think so, but I trust my friends are not of that sort.”

“ Mr. Carrol is not.”

“ No, he is a real good fellow. There is plenty of stuff in him, you will see, it is sure to come out some day. I only hope he will marry well, for he is very susceptible to female influence.”

“ Yes, of course, we must hope he will marry well.” As Luce, the serious circumspect air sitting quaintly on her young face, said these words with the gravity of an elderly matron discussing the prospects of her child, she had no idea of herself as a possible wife for Dick, nor did she for an instant suppose that Bruce meant anything by his remarks. These two were so unworldly that they could meet serenely on their own level, a level different to that of poor average humanity, though perhaps to some, such absence of guilelessness might have seemed the level of folly.

“ Marriage will be the making of him,” repeated Bruce, slowly rubbing his hands, “ and he is worth a good woman’s love.”

Luce said nothing ; she enjoyed the quiet and the luxurious sense of ease and warmth, as she listened to the praises of the man she loved, doled out in Bruce's slow measured tones. The slowness of the tones seemed to give greater weight to the praises. The candles had not yet been brought in ; shadows fell around, and a sense of darkness and mystery haunted the furthest corners of the room ; but in the cosy ingle under the recessed marble chimney-piece, rosy with the leaping reflections of the firelight, it was warm, and bright, and cheerful. Dick found them thus when, a few moments later, dry, and reclothed, he entered the room. "What, sitting in the dark ?" he said in his bright manly voice.

"The twilight is so pleasant," urged Luce, in extenuation of her idleness.

"And for a wonder you are not reading, Julian."

"No. Miss Windermere has entertained me agreeably."

"That is a great compliment for *you*," said Dick turning to Luce ; "the most beautiful woman in creation would not keep him a

moment if she were not agreeable and could not talk."

Luce blushed a little, but in the dim, rosy glow her blush was not observed.

"I have a letter from Granny," continued Dick, "and she tells me she has written to your uncle and aunt asking them to come with you and spend Christmas at Long Leam, or to spare you if they cannot leave home themselves.

"How delightful! I do hope it can be managed."

"It must be managed. Use all your diplomacy, Miss Luce, for I *want* you to come."

"I shall try my very best. How kind of Mrs. Carrol to ask me."

"I have told her so much. She is interested in you, and she likes young people."

"And I shall *love* her I am sure!" cried Luce, springing up with sudden energy as the footman entered, bearing the lamps.

CHAPTER XVI.

LADY Eleanor sent a civil excuse for herself to Mrs. Carrol, but Mr. Highview and his niece eagerly accepted the invitation. He remained the appointed time, at the end of which Mrs. Carrol begged him to confide Luce to her charge, and the girl, with anxious appeal in her eyes, pleaded hard for permission. Lady Eleanor, whom her husband consulted by telegram, graciously gave consent, and thus Luce became one of the family party at Long Leam. On her arrival Mrs. Carrol greeted her with out-stretched hands, and a cordial kiss, showed her into a bright little nest of chintz and white panelled walls, told her to make herself at home, and that she was glad to see her. The old lady's manner was so simple and so genuine that Luce,

who usually fled from strangers, was attracted at once.

“Would you like your tea here?” said the old lady, lighting two more candles on the dressing-table, “or will you come down stairs? Do just as you like.”

“I should like to come down,” said Luce, to whom kind consideration for her individual fancies was an unknown luxury. At dinner she sat next Dick, who was in unusually high spirits, and entertained her with a number of funny anecdotes about his dogs. And afterwards, she sang to Mrs. Carrol, in the large, dimly-lighted drawing-room. Luce had a pretty little voice, with a note of feeling and acute sensitiveness in it that occasionally proved unmanageable in the cold decorum of post-prandial singing, but, alone with old Mrs. Carrol (Mrs. Vincent having retired to look after some of her numerous brood of children), she sang unconcernedly to her heart’s content; sweet simple *volks-lieder*, of which her German governess had taught her at least a score, or old English ballads with a sad unfinished refrain. Mrs. Carrol dropped her knitting as the girl’s voice sounded clear

and pathetic, the high notes a little *voilées* through the spacious chamber ; she bent her head, and old-world dreams came to her. She saw herself again a merry girl in short-waisted muslin gown, her hair crowned by a large straw hat, and a circle of beaux round her whispering their prim and ceremonious addresses. How long ago it seemed, how very long, and yet her heart still felt quite young and fresh.

“ Do you like that, Mrs. Carrol ? ” Luce’s young voice asked from the piano.

“ Ah, my dear, come here.” The girl approached, and drawing a footstool near, sat at the old lady’s feet.

“ Give me your hand ; you have caused me so much pleasure.” She wiped away a tear with her thin cambric handkerchief as she said this. “ You made me young again. Where did you learn that way of touching people ? My grand-daughters sing, but they do not make me cry. See, I am quite a silly old woman.”

Luce drew down the slim and somewhat shrunken white hand, on which the antique diamonds and amethysts glittered brightly, and kissed it.

“I am so glad !” she gently sighed.

“It is good of you to amuse an old woman like me,” said Granny.

“It was good of you to let me come.”

“But we are dull people here,” said Granny, looking very closely into Luce’s face.

“I do not find it dull.”

“What, not away from your own home, your aunt, all your pleasures ?”

“My aunt does not care for my society.”

“But she loves you ?”

“I don’t know. Yes, I suppose she does,” said Luce, burying her face in Mrs. Carroll’s pale lilac brocade.

“I love you, child,” said Granny, gently. And then the two women, the old one and the young one, kissed each other, silently ; and Luce felt that love had come into her life. This love at least would never disappoint her ; it was so different from the violent friendships, their briefness measured by their violence, she had seen in the world of fashion ; and then, Luce reflected with infinite pleasure, they would at least have one surpassing interest in common—Dick’s welfare. For Luce, once admitted into the

grandmother's heart, became a sharer of her hopes and fears—planned, thought, and worked for Dick as Granny did. She could talk of him to her heart's content, for Granny loved him better than anything else in the world, and was never tired of discussing his affairs. She spoke seldom of her late husband or of her eldest son; all the concentrated love of years seemed poured out upon this young man, who, though neither his grandmother nor Luce confessed it, was but a very ordinary piece of humanity after all.

“When Dick is in Parliament he must marry,” planned the grandmother.

“Oh, yes,” echoed Luce, “a good wife will be the making of him. And then he is worthy of a good woman's love,” she added, remembering the words of his friend Bruce.

“I am so afraid of the present young ladies—I don't mind telling you this Luce, because you are not a bit like them—but I dread his bringing home a fine fashionable woman who would sneer at everything and make him miserable, for he has right feeling, the dear boy.”

Then Luce, thinking of Maud, agreed.

How terrible worldly cynicism coming from such rosy lips would seem to simple Granny. And one day when Luce had been singing her best, Granny took both her hands, and holding her at arm's length, after a prolonged look at her irregular features and the soft intelligent eyes, said, "My dear, I wish Dick would ask *you* to be his wife."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Carrol, don't say such things; indeed, indeed, I am not good enough. I am so plain you know."

"*I* don't think you plain, child; your eyes are wonderful, and you have such a sweet voice; and somehow, I am sure when you love you will love rightly, for remember, Luce, marriage without love is *misery*."

Luce bowed her head, and went to her room with a slow and chastened step.

Love—yes, indeed, she could love well, there need be no fear of that; she had not squandered her treasure and cast it at hazard right and left upon the waters; it was all there, pure and priceless, waiting to be thrown into the lap of him she loved. She would never change, she was sure of that, she had been starved too long; her hunger once appeased, it would be for ever. And then she

said to herself that her hopes were always dashed, and that the ideal never became reality, and that she must drive such thoughts from her mind.

Mrs. Vincent observed Granny's infatuation for Luce with increasing displeasure.

Luce mistrusted her, and involuntarily showed it, but Mrs. Vincent was more than a match for her, and determined upon the expulsion of the intruder.

"The little minx! what does she mean by coming here and making up to Granny in that disgusting way," she remarked on one occasion to her husband.

"She will have money some day, I expect," stolidly said Vincent, who just now felt considerable embarrassment from the want of some ready cash, and meditated asking Dick to lend him a little; "it would not be half a bad thing for Dick."

"Dick!" almost screamed Mrs. Vincent. "Is everything to be for him then. I wonder you are not ashamed of the way you try, on all occasions, to take the bread out of your children's mouths."

"Well, they are not likely to marry Miss Luce, at any rate; Watty is only just gone

to college, and you know he is awkward and has red hair, and Tom is at school. I don't think she would look at either of *them*."

"That's right, abuse your family; I am accustomed to it. But what I *do* know is, that that girl, with her pale face and her quiet ways, is a schemer. I have noticed her carefully. Why need she be always picking up the stitches in Granny's knitting, and singing those mawkish songs to her, and cooing over her like a hoarse wood-pigeon, and listening to all she says as if it were the gospel? I know what old people are; you have only got to flatter them and they believe it all."

"Why don't you do it then, Maria? You make good use of grannie, but you never put yourself out to say a civil word to her."

"I can't be a humbug," said Maria, sharply. "As dear Mr. Supple observed the other day in his sermon, we must not pander to unchristian desires. I caught Luce yawning over the delightful volume of sermons I was reading aloud the other night, but she never yawns when she reads that interminable poetry to Granny."

“ You should have brought up your girls to read poetry then.”

“ I’ll trouble you to leave my girls alone, poor darlings ; they are not hypocrites.”

“ Well, settle it your own way. I think Luce a very nice girl, unaffected and civil, which is more than most modern minxes are, and she can ride.” Therewith uncle Vincent departed to the stables to try and find Dick, with whom he desired a serious consultation. Things had not gone quite so well as he wished. The mare lamed herself one night in her box, and her work was stopped in consequence. This had thrown her out and made her go back in the betting, added to which there were ugly rumours about a dark horse, which had been kept specially for the Liverpool, and of whom the owners entertained sanguine anticipations. He found Dick smoking in the stables as he had expected, amusing himself with a couple of terriers, who were springing up and barking to their hearts’ content, while the bay horse in the stable looked round in silent wonder and contempt.

“ The mare has been lame,” blurted out

uncle Vincent, gloomily, when he approached.

“What! Fairy Queen?” said Dick, stooping to feel the horse’s legs.

“Yes, and it’s the devil!” Uncle Vincent put his hands in his pockets and stared at the neat straw plaiting that edged the stall.

“I suppose she’s all right again?” said Dick, sticking his pipe more firmly in the side of his mouth.

“Oh! yes, she’s right again, but —”

“But what? Did you get all the money on?”

“Yes, but there’s no chance of hedging at present, and I’ve laid against the favourite. If we shouldn’t win —”

“I thought you said we *should* win?” said Dick, less absently, straightening himself.

“Of course I expect we shall, but just now I’m a good deal pressed—you couldn’t lend me something, just for a month or two?”

“I haven’t a mag, myself, and I cannot think of asking Granny again.”

“And there are the training bills,” added uncle Vincent in a sepulchral tone.

“Hang it! I wish I had never listened to

you at all. It is much better fun betting on other people's horses than keeping them oneself, with all the confounded worries they entail upon you."

"If you don't want a share of the mare you can say so, I'll let you off, only I can't pay you for a bit."

"I don't mind; the mare seems a good thing. You have not told any one I am part owner, have you? for I don't want Granny to hear of it."

"As it happens, you are entire owner just now," grinned uncle Vincent, "for you advanced the money, and wrote me a line to that effect, which letter I kept—for business is business, you know."

"Well, if I think things look ugly I shall find a purchaser for the mare, that's all," said Dick, airily, turning away to the loose box, where the grey, who knew his voice, gently whinneyed him a welcome. Uncle Vincent was only half satisfied. Dick was too indifferent to go heart and soul into the business, and too sharp to be made a thorough tool of. Had he not been so, uncle Vincent would have entertained no scruples on the score of relationship. He despised

people who dealt in false delicacy: “the world is made for us all,” he would say, “and each man has a right to get the best place he can in it.” He and his wife were thoroughly agreed in their worship of self, but she carried it into the petty details of cast-off dresses, filching of grocery, or implied dishonesty in letting Granny pay the bills she herself had incurred; while uncle Vincent dealt with things in a broader and more manly spirit; in common parlance he was a sharp, could tinker up a screw, or sell an unsound or vicious horse for a sound one, and cheat a friend out of a sixpence, but he was no humbug. His very bluffness and heartiness caused Dick to bear him a grudging goodwill, and his companions to speak of him as “a capital fellow.” Nevertheless, if he could have seen his way towards jockeying Dick he would have done so with pleasure and chuckled over his own cleverness. It was infernally hard upon a fellow, he reflected, to be as it were dependent upon a boy like Dick, and forced to come cringing to him for a few driblets of the money which ought by rights to have been his. He had a grudge against fate. When his elder

brother died, the baby had no business to live, and grow up to plague deserving people with its health and strength, and prove a thorn in their side.

CHAPTER XVII.

LUCE had formed a habit of taking long and solitary walks. She was fond of exercise, and Granny insisted on her going out every afternoon. At first Luce demurred, saying she would prefer to drive with Granny or accompany her up and down the terrace, should she feel inclined to stroll. But Granny was firm. "It is too cold to drive," she said, "and if I want to walk Mrs. Vincent will give me an arm; but you are young, and you must run and step out and spring along as becomes your age." Luce obeyed. Granny's gentle exhortations, firm and mild as they were, had a different ring from Lady Eleanor's cold formulas. To walk for one's complexion, to prevent oneself looking sallow, seemed the direct converse to walking for one's pleasure in clear frosty air, tinged with exhilarating freshness.

Luce was returning one afternoon from an expedition to a distant common, where the low thorn-trees formed in summer a favourite resort for the nightingales. She was accompanied by Vic, the terrier, who had taken a violent fancy to her, and was stepping along quickly, notwithstanding her previous long walk. Behind her the sun, an incandescent ball, rested in a blood-red sheet of flame, which filled the horizon with a lurid glare, and threw a mantle of roseate hues over the bare branches of the distant trees ; beyond, the sky was of a pure steely blue, in which a few stars twinkled ; above, the crescent moon gleamed coldly. The air was calm ; but to stand still, even for an instant, became unpleasant and chilling to the blood. Luce hurried on ; it was getting late. Turning a corner she came up at right angles with a man who was getting over a stile out of a stubble field. A dog accompanied him, whom Vic, running forward, saluted joyously, presently rubbing herself up against his owner's legs, and thereby acknowledging her master.

“ Miss Windermere ! ” said he, stopping

to shift his gun on to the other shoulder, "how late you are; where have you been?"

"To Thornham Common," she answered.

"That is a long walk. I did not know you were a great pedestrian. I thought you were only a drawing-room young lady," said Dick with a laugh.

"This is not much of a walk, but I have the use of my limbs, I am happy to say."

"And you don't mind walking alone."

"I am accustomed to it," she answered briefly.

Dick accommodated his long stride to hers, and quite naturally prepared to walk home with her. For the first time they were alone together.

Their conversation, confidential as it had sometimes been, was always carried on in company, for the careless buzz of a drawing-room confers almost as great privacy as can be obtained on a lonely mountain-side. She and Dick were accustomed to society, and knew how to make the most of their advantages. But this solitary walk with the ruddy sunset, and the heavenly glow upon the silent earth; the chill landscape, devoid of all animal life; the strangeness, mingled

with the sense of comfort that came over her,—was a new experience. For a while she remained silent, commonplaces seemed foolish and unreal. Dick was silent, too; then, as they passed a small plantation, “To heel, Rover!” he cried, “to heel; that brute of a dog is after a rabbit.” This little incident, which occupied a few moments before the refractory dog,—who had ranged around rejoicing in the new-found experience of mischief, followed by Vic, to whom the temptation proved likewise overwhelming (for dogs, like men, easily copy a bad example),—had been chastised, reproved, and once more reduced to orderly behaviour, broke the ice, and dispelled the strangeness which had arrested Luce’s tongue.

“I’m so very glad you and Granny get on,” said Dick, whose observation of domestic affairs was tolerably keen; “it is a great pleasure to her to have your company.”

“No one could help loving her,” said Luce, warmly, “she is as good as you said, only still more perfect.”

“I don’t like perfection myself as a rule,” observed the young man, “it’s generally so deuced disagreeable, but I must say Granny

is kindness itself. I often feel sorry to see how shamefully uncle Vincent and his wife trade upon her kindness.” Dick omitted to state that he had frequently done the same, and the slight return he had offered her.

“She is devoted to you,” said Luce; “she would like to have you always with her.”

“Well, that is not possible,” laughed the young man.

“But now, when you are in Parliament, your duties to your constituents will bring you here oftener.”

“Oh, yes, I suppose they may; but you know, however fond I am of Granny, Long Leam is but a dull hole; I’m not master here; I can’t do a thing, and my uncle and aunt are almost always about poking their noses everywhere and interfering. Since you came it has been different; you understand me, and you’re young.”

“Yes, I am young,” answered Luce, feeling grateful for this bond of sympathy between them.

“And there is no nonsense about you—you are not vain like Maud, nor a prude like aunt Vincent.”

Luce was silent—she could not appraise herself.

“ Some day you will marry,” she said softly, “ and then you will not be lonely.”

“ Marry—no, I shan’t marry !” he said quickly.

Luce threw him a curious glance.

“ I mean, I don’t think I shall ever care for any woman enough to marry her ——”

“ Oh, Mr. Carrol, I am sure you will.”

“ That is to say—I don’t mind telling you, Luce (let me call you Luce, it is less stiff)—I have loved, I did love once—some one—very dearly indeed.”

“ And she died ?” asked Luce, in a low sympathetic voice.

“ No, she is married !”

“ Then she did not care ?”

“ To tell you the truth I do not know. I thought, I believed she did. I was mad and reckless and foolish, but she kept her head—and married.”

“ Poor Dick !” sighed Luce.

“ I felt it, I can tell you ; that was what made me take to politics, just to crush the pain. What did I say, that I would never marry ? *Of course* I shall marry any one grannie likes ; it is nothing to me now I can’t have *her*, and that is all over.”

At that instant the fiery glow faded out of the sky, the sun dropped, and with it gloom and darkness shrouded everything. Luce felt as though the light had gone out of her life. Dick could never love again.

“Why is not every one like you, Luce? Why are there hard things, and cruel things, and selfish people in the world? You have a kind heart, I know; you pity me.”

“Yes, I pity you,” said Luce, putting her little hand gently on his arm. “I know what it is not to be loved ——”

“It is not only that, but to feel that she belongs to another. God! I can’t bear even to think of it,” and he clenched his hand violently.

“It is very bad, I know,” said Luce, soothingly.

They walked a little way in silence. Then he said, stopping suddenly to look at her:

“What a strange girl you are, Luce. I do believe you care what happens to me, and yet you listen sweetly to what would make some women mad. They cannot bear to hear another praised.”

“I suppose she was very beautiful,” said Luce, calmly.

“Yes, she was beautiful—to my mind the most beautiful creature I ever saw, but what of that—her beauty did not keep her true—Ah! if she had only been like you—I know *you* are true.”

“Thank you,” said Luce, simply.

“I shall never forget her; of course it has altered my whole life, but I shall try to make the best of things.”

“You have great scope.”

“Do you know, Luce, perhaps Granny was right. I ought to marry—the sense that I was bound to another woman would prevent any vain harkings back—make the breach irrevocable—I do so fear being weak again; that woman has bewitched me, I believe.”

“It would not be fair to marry while you feel like that,” said Luce, decisively.

“I would be good to my wife, I would study her wishes, she should have the best of everything.”

“Except love.”

“Say rather except passion—I should love her in a different way.”

They had reached the gates of Long Leam and turned into the avenue; the dogs ran on in front joyfully sniffing and smelling about; the moon threw silvery gleams of light across the road, and Luce's face looked almost ghastly in its pallor. In another instant they would part indifferently, and a conversation so strange, so intimate, never be renewed. Luce made an effort.

"Thank you for telling me," she said; "I am so sorry you have suffered."

"It sours a man," he said, gloomily, kicking away with his boot a little mound of gravel; "but I suppose it happens to every one." And then they mounted the steps and rang the bell, and went into the firelight and cosiness, where Granny waited with the tea.

"What a little ghost you look!" said Granny, kindly, as she patted Luce's cold cheeks.

"These roads are not safe for girls to be out after dark," remarked Mrs. Vincent, sharply, looking up from her knitting; "but then, to be sure, you had an escort. Pray, Dick, did you go out with Miss Luce, or meet her by appointment?"

"I fell in with her accidentally, and was

exceedingly surprised to see her, wasn't I ? " said Dick, addressing Luce, and pouring himself out a cup of strong black tea.

" Why don't you ask one of my girls to go with you ? " said Mrs. Vincent, severely, to Luce; " I am sure it would be much better than trapesing about the country alone like a gipsy. You will be robbed and murdered some day."

" I am not worth robbing," said Luce, with a faint smile.

" Thieves can not know that ; by the time they have found it out you will be knocked down and battered about in the mud."

" There's a pleasant look-out for you," said Dick, cheerfully. " Aunt Vincent certainly has the most depressing ideas."

" I am not a fool," said Mrs. Vincent, with a fresh accent of dignity.

" Heaven defend me from accusing you of such a thing ; you are sharp enough for me."

The little sparring-matches which went on between Dick and his aunt amused him while they angered her, and served the present purpose of distracting her attention from Luce, to whom her stabs gave evident pain. The latter threw Dick a grateful look,

and stole nearer to Granny, in whose love was to be found honourable shelter.

That evening grannie played on the piano quaint sparkling gavottes and slow graceful minuets, and rippling fugues, stiff antiquated music often in the minor mode, set in its simple chords and perfect cadences. She characterized modern music as froth and flim-flams, abhorring with all the righteous horror of her soul the glaring discords and meaningless changes and artificial harmonies which make up a great share of its composition. Luce sat by the fire listening. As Granny's thin fingers glided gently over the keys—with a delicacy and precision wanting to many brilliant performers—the tightness at her heart relaxed, the keen pain she was enduring grew more tolerable, a gentle pity took the place of wounded love. Who was she, what was she, to exact more than could be given her? Trust, confidence, affection—she had all these—and yet she wanted more; her hungry heart cried out for nourishment - for the strong satisfying meat of love, and not the phantom food of friendship. Granny's life neared its close; those agile fingers must soon relax their grip, and

fall nerveless by her side ; the warm heart cease to beat, the eye gloss over with the film of death. What had she received, what happiness gilt her declining years, what prudent careful hand guided her steps, and given back love for love ? None that Luce could see, yet Granny was serenely, beautifully happy. “ It will come, I suppose, in time ; when I am old I shall be happy,” she thought, and rose to light Granny’s candle. Usually Luce lingered a while in Granny’s bedroom chatting or reading her to sleep ; to-night the old lady dismissed her quickly.

“ Go, dear,” she said, “ you look tired ; I am a selfish old woman to keep you—go, rest well ; God bless you, my own dear child.”

Granny folded her in her arms, and the withered cheek held a sweetness for Luce of which the peach-blossom skin of Lady Eleanor owned no suspicion. The one is human flesh, she thought, the other pearl-powder and cold cream. Luce waited till old Jane the maid appeared, carefully extinguishing her dip in the doorway as she entered, and proceeded to remove Granny’s pretty cap, and let the flowing grey hair

about her shoulders. Luce was never tired of admiring the old lady as she sat there, patiently submitting to the maid's ministrations.

“When I am old my hair will be grey too, and I shall be glad to be like you, Granny,” she said playfully, as she retired. Luce had to traverse the whole length of the broad corridor before arriving at her own room, and, as she did so this evening, through the swing-door at the end hurriedly burst Dick, in smoking-jacket and slippers.

“Is that you, have you left Granny—I wanted to speak to her?”

“She is going to bed. She dismissed me early; I think you had better not disturb her—it might interfere with her night’s rest.”

“Then I will not. Luce, stay a moment; you cannot be tired.” He took the candle gently from her hand, and put it on an old Italian chest that stood near. “Let me ask you a question. Do you remember our conversation of this afternoon?”

“Yes,” faltered Luce, scared at this opening.

“Well, I told you my story. I was

honest, at least ; many a man might not have confessed. I told you I must marry, Granny wishes it. She urged me again this evening. I cannot love as I have done, you know, but my wife will be very dear to me ; can you—will you be that wife ?”

Luce shrank away ; she covered her face with her hands.

“ Don’t shrink from me, dear. I tell you sincerely I never met a woman so true, so kindly, as yourself ; we should not quarrel I am sure. I can give you a nice home and comfort, and you love Granny —”

“ I could not make you happy —”

“ Oh, yes, I am easily pleased ; you suit me ; we have the same tastes ; I shall grow very fond of you, my little gentle mouse —”

“ No, no ! ” faltered Luce.

“ You need not be afraid ; I will not neglect you or be cruel to you. I shall love you as a dear sister, companion, friend, truly, lastingly. Passion is not happiness, I am sure of that now ; besides, you are too young for passion ; you must never know it—I am not a bad fellow, really —”

He did not love her, yet he offered to

marry her she thought. He had treated her fairly and honourably ; would any woman ask more or refuse him, who loved as Luce did with every fibre of her heart. She would force love from him, she felt ; would show him that she was not too young for passion (the very idea made her laugh). Some women might be too proud, might talk of self-respect, but where was the self-respect when one loved madly and unreasonably ? He would be hers, to love, to caress, to dream of, to scheme for, her life -- could she part from her life ?

“ Don’t be startled, dear ; it seems sudden, perhaps, to you, but not to me ; ever since I have known you and watched your sweet unselfish ways, I felt you were the woman for me, and Granny thinks so too.”

The family, then, had sat in conclave on her merits, had approved of her like a prize ox or a show cauliflower.

“ You will understand me, you will be lenient to my faults—I am full of faults.”

“ Ah, how you speak ! ” cried the girl, lashed by the violence of her feelings into speech. “ Do you think I have none ? Do you think I am made of marble ? Do you

think I can bear to hear you ask me to marry you and in the same breath confess you do not love me? Am I not human? Am I not a woman? Do I not love you?" The last words escaped in a sob, as Luce threw herself upon a chair and laid her burning face against its back.

"Luce, darling, *do* you love me; ah, I never hoped for this; I thought it would be a reasonable, a commonplace marriage—but *love* —"

"Why do you talk of love? Haven't you said already there is to be none between us?"

"The case is altered—you must *make* me love you, little one, you women are so clever."

Luce shook her head. "I am not clever enough for *that*."

"But a companion, Luce, a friend; a woman to whom one can tell everything; who has no petty jealousies, no envious thoughts; where could I find such another?—you are priceless, Luce, unique in your sex."

"Perhaps I shall be jealous," said Luce, slowly, "If I love you —"

"I will take the risk, little one," he said,

wrapping her in his arms, while his silky moustache rested on her lips. The first kiss! More suffering than bliss was contained in it. It had an acrid taste of sub-acute pain mixed with the pleasure, for she was not his really, but his only on sufferance, his by pressure of lips rather than gift of heart ; his wife, his betrothed, but not *the* woman in the world for him ! And yet, as she lay in his arms, despising herself for her weakness, conscious of all she was surrendering, of her young life dedicated, her body given, her soul a slave, she felt she could do no otherwise, and yielding, faintly murmured with a sigh of content, “ Mine, mine ! ”

CHAPTER XVIII.

As from some wonderful dream Luce awoke the next morning, asking herself if it was true. The midnight interview in the corridors, the words spoken in the silence and shadow of night, the long-drawn kiss, the moment of passion she had experienced, rose to her mind, painted in glowing mystical colours. What had she done?—betrayed her maidenly modesty, given her promise to a man who did not love her. Oh, it was weak, execrably weak, and yet she felt, did the temptation return, she must succumb to it once more. She lingered over her toilet, she dared not, with the guilty blush of shame upon her cheek, face Mrs. Vincent and her coldly cruel eyes and plausible stinging advice. The breakfast-bell rang, but she did not stir; presently there came a tap

at her door, “Was Miss Windermere ill, would she like her breakfast upstairs ?” “Oh no, no !” cried poor Luce, feeling that she must take the awful plunge. In the dining-room, over the remains of breakfast, sat Mrs. Vincent, her husband, and Granny. Dick’s place was empty, but Luce divined that he had finished his meal. At least then she need not dread his eyes. How would he look, had he repented already, was it only a heated fancy, born and bred of night, would he seem cold and distant, perhaps tell her it was all a mistake ? Luce approached the table slowly.

“Come here, dear,” said grannie, holding out her hand, “sit by me. Have you slept well ?”

“You went to bed early enough, said Mrs. Vincent, sharply, “though I believe you amused yourself walking about afterwards, for I heard steps and voices in the corridor till any hour, and very nearly came out to see what was the matter.” This speech conjured up an awful vision before Luce’s eyes. If Mrs. Vincent, in nightcap and dressing-gown, had indeed appeared like an avenging fury, candle in hand, just at the

instant of that portentous kiss ! “ However, I said to myself, it’s probably only some of those silly maids whispering and giggling, and it was really too cold to turn out of bed for such nonsense.”

“ You were right not to disturb yourself,” said Luce, gravely.

“ Doesn’t the housekeeper go round the house, Granny ? ” pursued Mrs. Vincent, pleased to direct her attack upon another inoffensive creature. “ She should go round the very last thing, lock all the maids into their rooms, and see that every door is shut. *I* do that at home, but, of course, one can never trust servants. It is very foolish to do so.”

“ The doors are always locked by the butler,” said Granny, quietly.

“ But so often men are drunk. It is really not safe to leave it to them.”

“ I can trust Porter,” said Granny ; “ he has been with me these fifteen years.”

“ Ah, well, of course, if you are *sure*. Some people *have* such confidence, and seem quite surprised when they are imposed upon.”

“ I would rather trust than always sus-

pect, as you do, Maria. You render your life wretched by your suspicions."

"That is better, at least, than to be made a fool of."

After breakfast Luce followed Granny into her own little study, and there, having first carefully shut the door lest Mrs. Vincent's sharp ears should be within reach, she drew Luce to her and said, "Thank you, my dear, dear child. Dick tells me that he has asked you to be his wife."

"But oh, Granny," said Luce, flushing and trembling, "I don't know whether I ought; I am so plain, he will never love me. How *can* I make him happy?"

"Have no fear, child, you love him?"

"Oh yes, I love him dearly." She had the right to say it now; she raised her eyes and looked proudly at grannie. The old lady seemed to sympathise; she patted her hair gently, and made her sit beside her.

"I am so glad to have you as a daughter, I think we understand each other." The cold wintry sun laid a ray upon Luce's brown hair till it shone like gold, while a gleam of the sunshine sparkled in her eye. "You must not be afraid of yourself and say you are

plain. You are going to be very happy, and a happy woman is never plain. To my mind Mrs. Vincent is plain, and yet she was a fine girl in her youth, or Vincent would never have married her; but ill-temper and envy have dragged down her mouth, and unkindness has robbed her eye of its light. Character stamps faces, you know."

Luce realised this as she glanced at Granny's mouth—the sweetest, humanest feature in her kind countenance.

"And now, my child, I am not going to be selfish, you want to see Dick; you have a number of things to talk about; you are young, and the world is before you; go, be open and confiding with each other, it is the secret of happiness."

"I won't go yet," said Luce, clinging to Granny's hand. "I like to be with you; you do me good; you are so young."

Granny smiled. That young heart of hers had played sad pranks in the aged breast, and yet she would not have changed it with Mrs. Vincent's stony organ for all the world.

"Granny, tell me about *your* youth, your

time of love; how pretty you must have been then!"

"He said so—my husband:" said Granny with a sigh. "But he was partial, for he loved me dearly. We were very happy—but that was fifty years ago--and then he died."

"And you never married again?"

"Why should I? Each fortunate creature has its gleam of sunshine on earth. I had had mine; it could never come again. I waited, I have been waiting forty-five years, my time is drawing near."

"But, Granny, you have lived a dozen lives in those you have made happy."

"I have tried my best; though we can do little ourselves; we must leave it all to God."

Luce sat stroking Granny's fingers; she did not speak, seemingly absorbed in noting the quaint-cut sparkling gems that adorned them.

"I wonder if I shall be happy, Granny?"

"Of course you will, child; though even should you not, remember 'as your day is so shall your strength be.'"

"I am not strong, my nerves are weak—I

dread to suffer—if I should prove a burden to my husband ! ”

“ Husband ” had a sweet sound ; Luce’s tongue lingered over it tenderly.

“ A girl who loves should not talk like this.”

“ I have never believed myself destined for happiness ; a quiet twilight of contentment suits me best, the half-lights and subdued tints are mine.”

“ But yet you see Providence has willed it otherwise ; he has given to me my fondest wish—a dear daughter ; and now, Luce, I cannot let you moralise any more. I shall call Dick.”

Luce submitted passively, and presently, when Granny had been absent a few moments, Dick slowly pushed the door open. His eyes took in Luce’s figure, her nervous agitation, her gentle questioning look, the happiness in her eyes, that scarce suppressed, radiated at sight of him. He stepped forward and took both her hands in his.

“ Luce,” he said, standing over her gravely ; “ you have not repented, you mean to be my wife ? ”

“ You really wish it ? ”

“Of course ; I cannot trifle with such serious things.” Her eyes brightened.

“Oh, Luce !” he continued, taking a place beside her on the narrow couch. “Grannie is so pleased ; she says it will be the making of me ; that you are just what I wanted—the balance of love she called it in her poetical fashion.”

“But there is to be no love,” said Luce, with affright. Whatever might betide, there must be *truth* between them.

“Well, we’ll see about that. Won’t aunt Vincent be rabid, just? we haven’t told her yet, you know ; she always hoped I should never marry, and leave her sons to inherit.”

“That was not likely,” broke in Luce, hotly. “How can people be so mean ?”

“She is the incarnation of meanness ; she is mean even to that poor, cunning, foolish wretch of a husband, for whom she has a sneaking affection ; she stints him in his food, which makes him so fond of coming here to get a good meal, and she is always reproaching him because his nose is red, and he smells of stables.

“Horrid !” said Luce.

“We will not be like that, Luce ; we will

have no secrets and no shams; if we are poor, we will be poor, and not pretend; though I know Granny will deluge us with all manner of kind things, so there is no fear of that."

"I am glad," said Luce, laying her head on his shoulder. "I don't think poverty would suit you, and I should hate being the involuntary cause of it."

"Little duck! you grow prettier every day, Luce. You must get yourself a blue gown with brown fur on it like Maud Hardfast's, it would suit you so well."

"I don't care to dress like Maud Hardfast. I shall always be plain and simple. Aunt used to say I never did the best French dressmaker any credit."

"But you have a neat little waist and the tiniest of hands — by Jove, Luce, what a tiny hand it is! I shall never be able to get a ring to fit you."

"I don't want rings," said Luce, shortly.

"Rubbish! I shall give you a ring, a little plain gold band with a turquoise in it, the colour of evening sky as it is called, to remind you of that walk we took last night."

Was I a brute, Luce, to talk to you as I did?"

"I should never have forgiven you if you had not told me. To think that you were unhappy and that I could help you, gave me confidence. Do you really believe I shall make you happy?"

"I am sure of it," said Dick, sealing the assertion with a kiss.

"Then, Dick," she hesitated, twining her fingers softly around his, "then Dick, you will tell *her* that you mean to marry me. You will not give her unnecessary pain, not leave her to hear it from a stranger."

"As I heard of her marriage," interrupted Dick, angrily. "Why not? She must be nothing to me now."

"But I should feel happier if she knew, if she gave her consent; you understand Dick what to say, you need not see her, I don't think I should like *that*, but, just write to her kindly, to please me."

"I think it very unnecessary," he answered somewhat sullenly. "Of course she does not care now—why should she? She left *me* first, she spoilt my life."

"Oh, Dick!"

“ Well,” he said, taking her in his arms, “ I mean she spoilt it until you came with your really nice ways; and now you are going to make something good of me; you will have all your work cut out, though, I tell you beforehand.”

Luce was very happy, so happy that her blunted confidence in herself returned; she was evidently not destined to be the pariah in life she had supposed, but to taste of the rich banquet of love. The reaction from severest self-denial to perfect unfolding of each hidden petal of her tender heart, made the sense of bliss more exquisite. Even the letter which had to be written to Lady Eleanor cost her little effort, though she knew that the answer would inevitably pour a cold douche of worldly sarcasm upon the warmth of her feelings. Lady Eleanor promptly wrote back in a kind and congratulatory strain which seemed to her appropriate to the occasion.

“ MY DEAR LUCE,

I cannot express to you my pleasure at finding that you have at last profited by the excellent education I gave you. It is a girl’s first duty to respond to

the efforts her elders make on her behalf, and to do credit to her training. You must have managed well to have secured Mr. Carrol, who at his grandmother's death will inherit a handsome fortune, and, as the latter is turned seventy, you will not have long to wait. I had lately heard unfortunate rumours about Mr. Carrol's little affair with Miss Bray before her marriage, but of course, as he has proposed to you, this can only have been a caprice on his part, which absence and change of scene have dispelled. They tell me Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Carrol are regular sponges and live upon the old lady; of course you will make it your business to oust them as soon as possible. There cannot be two mistresses in a household. I have always acted upon this principle in my life, and have found it answer well. Be perfectly sure of your own position, and secure it by every means in your power. Is there anytime proposed for the wedding? I see no reason for delay, and think that as soon as the election is over you could be married. It will not take long to get the settlements drawn out, and the trousseau ready. Let me hear what are

your views on this matter, and believe me,
my dear Luce,

Your affectionate aunt,
ELEANOR HIGHVIEW.

The letter dropped from Luce's fingers.

“The little affair with Miss Bray.” So that was the way Dick's love, a love which he said had altered his whole life, was spoken of; every one was aware of it; it formed the subject of sarcastic talk between Lady Eleanor and her gossiping friends. Besides which, Lady Fenchurch lived in the next county, not more than fifteen miles from Long Leam, and Luce and she must meet and speak and smile at each other, and hold out their hands with the knowledge of the past burning in their hearts. So long as Dick's love had been a secret confided to her only, so long as it was but a kind of honourable trust, Luce had felt capable of taking a philosophical view, in which disapproval neatly tempered by pity was not found unendurable, but to share this secret with the common herd, to hear it spoken of and glossed over, and sneered at, would need almost superhuman strength, while, to feel

she had contented herself with another's leavings must be sadly wounding to vanity. Thus argued Luce. Finally reproaching herself for fainting already beneath the burden she had freely accepted, she descended to the drawing-room to sing, as was her usual habit, to Granny in the twilight. Granny was not there, however, but Mrs. Vincent was. The third day of Luce's engagement had now arrived, and, at her earnest request, Mrs. Vincent was told nothing definite until the consent arrived from Lady Eleanor. Mrs. Vincent, however, had her suspicions, and promptly attacked Granny, who, taken at a disadvantage, was signally routed and confessed the truth.

“Ah, I always said she was a schemer,” snorted Mrs. Vincent. “Those girls with brown hair and pale faces and quiet unobtrusive manners always are. They perpetually watch you and find out your very thoughts in the style of a perfect nineteenth-century inquisition. I knew she was up to mischief.”

“Dick loves her,” said Granny, meekly.

“Fuzzle-de-boo! he loved Evelyn Bray six months ago, and he will love some one else

six months hence. Luce merely flattered him and traded on his weakness ; bless you, I know it all ; young men are as weak as water."

" She will make him an excellent wife."

" And pray what did he want a wife for ? Or why couldn't he have married one of his cousins ? There is Dolly, who plays the piano like a professor, she will be eighteen next month, or Eliza, who draws in oils and watercolours, she is sixteen and has a lovely complexion. But to go and marry a plain girl like Luce. However, I suppose it's for her money. Will she have a large fortune ? "

" As far as I know she will have none ; she is entitled to none at least, unless her uncle chooses to leave her something."

" What a disgusting affair !" responded Mrs. Vincent, flouncing out of the room.

It may be surmised from this specimen of Mrs. Vincent's feelings that when Luce found her alone in the drawing-room the former lady did not scruple to give her a bit of her mind.

" You are mighty close, Miss," she said. " I congratulate you on being able to hold

your tongue. In my day, when young ladies were engaged to be married they did not make a secret of it, but they consulted their family and asked for their consent."

"I don't know what you mean," said Luce, holding her music-book before her like a shield.

"Oh, don't you? I understand you wish to become my niece, but you haven't asked my advice."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Vincent; I scarcely see what you have to do with me."

"Highty-tighty, young lady, you take it very coolly. You are not mistress here yet."

The words of Lady Eleanor's letter flashed to Luce's mind; her aunt was right; this woman would be a thorn in her side. Accustomed to gentle yielding, Luce said:

"Well, Mrs. Vincent, you don't object to me. I hope we shall be good friends."

"Friends! you have acted like an enemy. You came here determined to captivate my nephew. I saw you, I appreciated your little game; you humbugged Dick, pretending to care for the dogs and the horses, and sitting openmouthed when he talked of his

speeches and his canvassing; you, who know he can't string three words together grammatically. You did lapdog to Granny, and boxed yourself up with her until you made her think you preferred a doting old woman's society to the amusements suited to your age. Luce Windermere, I have seen through your intrigues, I appreciate your subterfuges, you cannot humbug *me*."

When she paused for breath Luce quietly observed, "I have no wish to humbug you, Mrs. Vincent, I wished to be friends; but if you will not have it so, I suppose I must submit. Dick has asked me to marry him, and that is a question on which I think he must be the best judge."

"Hear her, the little plausible minx; just now the gentle shrinking madam did not know what I meant, but she understands at least what she means herself; you will be an excellent wife for Dick, madam; he will not dare to say a word to save his life; he is very fortunate, I must say, to have such a termagant for his own. I shan't trouble you much, oh dear no!"

Aunt Vincent seized her worsted, skewered

it with the large crochet-pin, and stalked from the room. Luce had gained a victory, but it was dearly bought. Mrs. Vincent was her enemy for life !

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY FENCHURCH meanwhile passed her time in considerable suspense and anxiety. Her canvassing was but half-hearted, for she felt herself a traitor to both causes, while she tried to shut her ears to all mention of Dick, and to devote her attention to her husband's interests. This was the less difficult, as Miss Fenchurch, with all an old maid's pertinacity, read the local Tory paper outloud every day from beginning to end, emphasizing the favourable comments upon Sir Hilary's speeches with her own pithy remarks, and holding him up to admiration on all occasions. No man need blow his own trumpet when he has adoring womankind belonging to him, the tone they are able to produce is much more strident and far-reaching than any effort of which he is capable. Miss

Fenchurch admired her brother beyond everything, and was never tired of dinging into Lady Fenchurch's ears that she ought to esteem herself fortunate in holding the proud position of his wife. Naturally, when we are told to be thankful for undeserved blessings we rebel against the suggestion, and Lady Fenchurch scarcely felt as grateful as she ought to have done. Sir Hilary was irritable too. He was forced to get up early and drive long distances on foggy cold days, and occasionally return late for dinner, in addition to the unceasing worries of agents, electors, and the numerous temptations to bribery ; and these things disturbed his equanimity and his digestion, and made him less amicable at home. It was therefore with considerable tremor that Evelyn received a letter in Dick's handwriting duly extracted from the postbag at the matutinal breakfast-table, and handed to her by Sir Hilary. He was absorbed in the perusal of his own correspondence at the moment, and did not notice that his wife, on reading the superscription of the envelope, blushed, slipped it into her pocket, and pretended to sip her tea ; but Miss Fenchurch's eagle-eyes

observed the manœuvre, and she quickly inquired: “From whom is your letter, Evelyn, and what is it all about—good news, I trust?”

“It is nothing important,” said Evelyn, feeling guilty; “dear me, how late it is to be sure; I had no idea we had been such an age at breakfast. Where are you going to-day, Hilary?”

“I have a long ride before me; Dewsnap goes too; some doubtful fellows to visit the other side of the country. I may be late for dinner; you need not wait for me ——”

“*Of course* we shall wait,” said Miss Fenchurch with dignity, shutting the tea-caddy with a snap.

Evelyn hurried to her room at the earliest opportunity, and there with trembling hands she tore open her letter.

“My friends wish me to marry, but I can do nothing without telling you, Evelyn. If you do not approve, say so freely, though I scarcely think that my actions can in any way interest you now. DICK ——”

Evelyn walked up and down in agitation; a few tears sprang to her eyes. She had never cared for Dick sufficiently to break

her heart for him, though she had nursed her love into an interesting and sentimental grievance. She sincerely meant to forget him, and her life with Sir Hilary was as pleasant and honourable as she had ever anticipated; yet she would have been scarcely a woman had she heard of her lover's engagement unmoved. What was she to answer, how could she write? Anger, wounded pride, and sentimental love all struggled for mastery in her breast; first she vowed he should not marry; then she said he should, and suffer for it; finally she persuaded herself she did not care, and that it was a matter of perfect indifference to her. All the morning she walked up and down her room with impatient uneven steps, winding and crushing her pocket-handkerchief between her fingers, biting her lips, and behaving altogether like a foolish passionate woman.

Presently Miss Fenchurch knocked at the door. "What is the matter, Evelyn? Do let me in. You fidget me so, walking up and down in that irritating way. I can hear you as I sit in the library; if you want exercise why don't you go out, and take

Jenny Jones her broth. You promised she should have it to-day."

"I will not walk up and down any more," said Evelyn, calmly, through the half-open door. "I am busy writing letters; if necessary, my maid can take Jenny Jones her broth."

Jenny Jones, indeed! Broth, indeed! Far other cares occupied her thoughts. Miss Fenchurch somewhat grumblingly retired, and Lady Fenchurch once more resumed the thread of her self-discourse. For one thing she was not *very* sorry for this project of Dick's, it would have been no doubt sweet to meet occasionally, and to consider herself the guiding-star and angel of a young man's life; but then again people had gossipped a little about her. Miss Fenchurch told her this one day when she had lectured her about the propriety of demeanour necessary in the young wife of an elderly baronet. Sir Hilary's eye, too, had glittered with a strange light when he inquired if she had met Dick on the day of their last interview, and her position was altogether too comfortable and easy for her to risk the loss of it. After a while Evelyn sat down, and, taking

a fair sheet of paper, she quickly wrote these few words :

“ Yes, Dick, it is best so. Marry if you think it will give you happiness, and forget me. God bless you always.”

She read over this letter, and thought as she did so that a little pique sounded through the expression of her good wishes ; yet, as it was written now, the sentences, poor and unsatisfactory as they seemed, must remain. The very mystery and doubt that hung about them might give more impressiveness to the decision. She closed up the letter, put it in her pocket where Dick’s note rested already, and came down to luncheon dressed for driving.

“ I am going into West Thorpe,” she said unconcernedly to Miss Fenchurch ; “ will you come also ? ”

“ No, thank you ; I have too much regard for my health ; there is a bitter east wind blowing, and I should be sure to get neuralgia.”

“ Very well, then, I will order the pony carriage and drive myself.”

“ Are you sure you will not catch cold ? Hilary would not like that you know.”

“ I am not afraid of a little bit of cold ; it braces me, and I can well take care of myself,” said Lady Fenchurch, somewhat haughtily. She would post her letter in West Thorpe, she said to herself, and thus feel sure it would reach its destination ; and perhaps, who could tell, see Dick walking or riding in the town ; and she would leave her pearl necklace at Cherry and Appleton, the goldsmiths, and get them to re-string it, for one of the beads had become detached the last time she wore it. She drove the ponies—who jumped and kicked about, and in their joy at leaving the stable nearly pulled her arms off—quickly into West Thorpe, and drew up with a splash at the door of the jeweller. One of the fat partners came out bowing and smiling. “ Now mind, I want the necklace back on Friday,” she said, “ for Sir Hilary does not know the string is broken, and he wishes me to wear it at a large dinner-party the same night. He is very particular ; don’t forget, please.”

“ I won’t forget, your ladyship,” said the jeweller, as he watched her flick the steaming ponies with her whip and start off again rapidly.

“A fine young woman, that,” he said to himself, as he leisurely re-entered the shop ; “looks as if she had a will of her own, too.”

Evelyn drove about the town, bought lace at the draper’s and an almanac at the stationer’s, and called at the grocer’s, and gave an order at the fruiterer’s, and posted her letter, but no sign did she see of Dick, nor did she hear his name mentioned by any of the obsequious tradespeople who served her. Reluctantly she turned her ponies’ heads, and proceeded at a more sedate pace towards home. Indeed, what had she expected ? After such a letter how could she speak to him, save as a perfect stranger ; how should she school her lips, her eyes, those tell-tale creatures ; and yet with the duplex sensitiveness to impressions of her sex, she longed to meet him, to watch the effect of her communication, to note if he cared for the girl he was going to marry. She had a curiosity to know something about her too ; of course, it was not a union of love. Evelyn pressed her lips together haughtily, *she* could not be forgotten already. Possibly the affair might have been arranged so as to stop the mouth of scandal. That was just like him,

to be kind and considerate to her. *She* had not been so considerate, leaving him to hear of her marriage from the newspapers ; but then men and women were different—he was bound to regard *her* reputation, her honour—while her duties towards him were less plain and imperative. Deep in thought she slackened her hold upon the ponies, and one of them, missing the pressure of the bit, sprang on one side shying sportively at a glistening puddle. His mistress was all attention at once.

“ Quiet, Box,” she said, patting him gently with her whip, “ quiet, quiet ! ” As she spoke in caressing accents to her ponies she suddenly discovered what, owing to this little difficulty, had escaped her previous observation, that the horseman rapidly approaching was Dick himself. Involuntarily she checked the ponies, and he pulled up, and, as they both did so, both coloured at the recollection of their own thoughts, and remained silent. She first recovered herself.

“ I have just posted a letter to you,” she said, with a pretty hesitation.

“ Is it satisfactory ? ” he asked, eagerly.

“How do you mean?” She drew herself up rather stiffly. “I cannot tell what will satisfy you.”

What, indeed! It was a strange position for a young woman, and both felt it, while their very hesitation prolonged the dilemma.

“I know you will do what is kind and wise,” he said, soothingly.

“Kind and wise!” she repeated; “it is not so easy to know what *is* kind and wise. You must please yourself; you have a right.”

“I should like to be sure you are happy—that you do not care”—he said, lingeringly.

“Of course, I am very happy; you have no right to doubt it,” she said, haughtily. “I suppose it is your cousin you mean to marry?”

“No, not my cousin—a very nice girl, though.” Then remembering that praise of another could not be particularly agreeable to Evelyn, he added, “Granny wishes it; it is to please her, you know.”

“Exactly—you feel like a good little boy. Well, I’m sure, I hope the plan will succeed.”

Evelyn smiled somewhat sarcastically
He felt nettled.

“I gave you the choice, you had my life
in your hands—it is not too late even now.”
He knew he could count on Luce’s generosity
and forbearance, especially as there
was no question of love between them.

“Evelyn, pray speak! What do you
wish?”

“I wish nothing. I am satisfied you
should do what you think best for yourself.”

“Evelyn! Evelyn! if things had been
different —”

“Well, it is no use thinking of that now,
is it?” she said, flicking one of the ponies so
that he started, then checking him abruptly
with a turn of her wrist, “we had better
talk of something else.”

“You have been shopping?” he asked
absently, biting his moustache and wondering
how far he dare speak of his feelings.

“Yes,” she answered lightly, “buying
trash, the kind of useless trifles women can
never resist when they see them in shops—
would you like an almanac for the new
year?—and I have been leaving my pearl
necklace to be re-strung at the jewellers. It

was a birthday present from Sir Hilary, you know, and he likes me particularly to wear it."

"Which jeweller do you employ?" he asked, mechanically, still pondering what he should say next.

"Oh, the old-established pair, Cherry and Appleton. What funny old men those two partners are, with their rosy cheeks and bald heads; and the way they have of always washing their hands with imaginary soap as they talk to you."

Dick thought Evelyn had not improved, her manner was decidedly flippant.

"I must go now, you will let me know the result of my letter—or no, you had better not—I shall learn it soon enough, this is such a gossiping county."

And with these light words they parted; the impatient ponies gladly obeyed the encouragement given them to go, and shaking their merry heads trotted off briskly.

Dick, left alone, brushed his hand across his eyes, and somewhat moodily rode on. So it was over; he was free; and henceforth a parliamentary career and Luce must be his guiding stars. How easily she had quitted

him ; how little she had appeared to care ; and yet for that woman he nearly broke his heart, as near, namely, as a gay young man can ever break what he is pleased to call his heart. He had endured horrid scruples, and bitter thoughts, and sleepless nights, and once his appetite had failed, and he had felt weary and disillusioned and sad ; and behold in the same breath she could give him his *congé*, drive her ponies gaily, and prattle of the birthday present Sir Hilary had given her, pearls, precious stones--of course no woman could resist their fascination. He did not know that women hide the deepest grief under a gay exterior ; that dissimulation and smiles are the parry and thrust of the sexes' lively fencing. Had he beheld Evelyn a moment later, with the gaiety vanished, the brow puckered, the lips close pressed and drawn down, and sombre annoyance written upon her countenance, perhaps he might have changed his opinion. Notwithstanding the east wind, the ponies steamed and panted when they stopped at the bottom of the stone steps of Oakdene. Evelyn threw the reins carelessly on their backs, while the agile

groom jumped down and ran up the steps to ring the bell.

“Sir Hilary has returned,” said the butler, when he assisted Lady Fenchurch out of the carriage, “and he expects you in the library.”

“Why, it is not tea-time yet, is it Jones?” asked Evelyn wonderingly.

“No, my lady, it has but just struck four.”

Leisurely stripping off her gloves as she went along, Evelyn pushed open the door of the library and beheld Miss Fenchurch and her brother in close confab on the rug in front of the fire.

“Shocking! how ungrateful!” Miss Fenchurch was saying in shrill maidenly tones. They parted guiltily at Evelyn’s approach, who, with cheeks slightly reddened by the chill atmosphere in which she had been driving, and eyes still glistening with emotion, looked questioningly towards them.

“Ah! here is Evelyn,” said Miss Fenchurch. “Now I will just leave you two together, while I go and finish marking those pocket-handkerchiefs of yours, Hilary.”

Miss Fenchurch, with angular activity,

slipped from the room, and left the husband and wife alone.

Sir Hilary, who was dressed in riding-clothes, began to flick nervously with his whip against his high leather boots, while Lady Fenchurch, engaged in unbuttoning her sealskin jacket, remarked unconcernedly upon his early return.

“How soon you came home to-day, Hilary! I thought you said you were going for a long ride with Dewsnap, and that we were not to wait dinner for you. I never expected to see you already,” she said, cheerfully.

“I have no doubt you did not,” he answered drily.

“I hope you are not ill?” she continued, in a tone of wifely concern.

“Oh dear no—not that I’m aware of.”

“Haven’t you had a good day, dear?”

“Well, I don’t know what *you* call a good day; I should call it a very bad one,” he answered, sharply.

“What is it—won’t you tell me? I am so sorry, Hilary,” said Evelyn, sweetly.

“Sorry! Fashionable wives don’t care much about their husbands’ annoyances.”

“ I am not a fashionable wife.”

“ You are trying to be one.”

“ What is the matter, Hilary ? Do speak out.”

“ It might not be pleasant for you if I spoke out ; however, I will be as explicit as I can. Tell me truly ; did you gain or lose by marrying me ? Have I been kind to you ; let you have all you wished for—given you presents ? ”

“ Yes, yes ! ” cried Evelyn, wonderingly, remembering the pearl necklace, and Sir Hilary’s generosity, “ you have been most kind.”

“ And how have you repaid me ? I certainly was not a puling schoolboy when I married you. I did not write verses to your eyes, or compare you to the moon, or practise any of the silly sentimental fashions of young fools. I did not do this, and I did not think you would expect me to do it, but I gave you my name, and a position, and a home, and everything which an honest man can give his wife. Say, did I, or did I not ? ” as Sir Hilary spoke he drew himself up.

“ You have behaved very well.”

“ Then why do you on your part deceive me, and disgrace me, and make my name a by-word ? ”

“ I ? Hilary, what do you mean ? ”

“ You know, you know well enough, you had a love affair with that young Dick Carrol while you were engaged to me; you met him at the Meynells, they told me so themselves; he was in Switzerland at the very time of our honeymoon, I believe you saw him; you have met him since, clandestinely, on the road to-day even for aught I know ”

Evelyn turned white, and her knees trembled under her; appearances were certainly suspicious; yet she was really innocent, but could she convince Sir Hilary of this. He was a rough, straightforward, honourable man, he would understand none of the delicate mental sophistry in which feminine minds excel; his anger once excited would, she knew, be difficult to allay. He continued

“ Why you didn’t marry him I am at a loss to conceive; you *were* free once, and no one would have objected; instead of which you let me become your husband under false pretences, to redeem the word I gave your

father (a real gentleman if ever there was one) when he died under my roof, and I promised to take care of his daughter. How could I do this better than by marrying you ? Evelyn, you have treated me shamefully ! ”

“ Indeed, Hilary, if you will only listen, I am not so guilty as you think.”

“ Not so guilty ! I only acknowledge two things—right and wrong.”

“ I mean I have been a good wife to you, and I intend to continue ; don’t be so harsh in your judgments ; if I—if Mr. Carrol ——”

“ If you love each other, I suppose you mean, what does it signify ? But it does signify ; I’ll stand no playing fast and loose under my roof ; answer me, has there been any love-making between you and Carrol—I want a plain answer, yes or no ? ” He seized her hand and held her at arm’s length threateningly. The blood crimsoned his wife’s fair cheek and the veins in her neck swelled visibly.

“ You must not speak like that,” she said haughtily. “ I am not a prisoner.”

“ No, by heaven ! ” he said bitterly, letting her go and falling back a step. “ I know that ; and no bars and bolts can keep a woman

from getting her head loose, and doing as she pleases. Well, answer me, tell me the truth if you can."

"The truth is this," she said rapidly, hurrying her words as if to get the anguish of speaking over quickly. "The truth is that I *did* meet Dick Carrol at the Meynells; he liked me, he said, and I listened, for a little—then I remembered you."

"It was high time you did," muttered her husband between his teeth.

"And I told him of my engagement and that I meant to keep it; after that I married; I have seen Mr. Carrol once or twice since accidentally—that is all I have to tell you."

"My sister says you blushed violently to-day when a letter was put into your hands; you seemed agitated all the morning and drove into West Thorpe this afternoon. Was the letter from Mr. Carrol, and did you see him?"

"He wrote to tell me he was going to be married; I saw him coming out of West Thorpe; I met him riding, and we spoke for a few moments about nothing—I said I had been shopping." Sir Hilary's brow grew more cloudy.

“Very nicely concocted, a sweet simple story, which does your heart and your head credit, only unfortunately I don’t believe a word of it.”

“Hilary!” she exclaimed, in amaze.

“Evelyn! You must try to understand that I resent being imposed upon; when I deal fairly with people I expect them to deal fairly with me; you have not done so, consequently I cannot believe the most plausible story you may set up.”

“Don’t be jealous, Hilary,” she pleaded.

“Jealous! am I jealous? I don’t think so; I wish to be just, just to you and just to myself. All this affair is too new and too unfortunate for you and me to discuss it quietly. Go to your room, Evelyn; let us both think—and try to have confidence in me if you can,” he added, more gently.

“You will not believe me; what can I say, what can I do? I would not make you unhappy, or vex you, if I could help it. I am not really to blame. I was only weak and foolish—and afraid,” she said, falteringly.

“Yes,” he said, conducting her to the door with his old-fashioned politeness, which, even at such moments, did not desert him.

“Yes, weak and foolish, that is what all women begin by, and then later they are not afraid to be wicked.”

Evelyn sobbed when she reached her room, she threw her gloves and hat petulantly aside and cried till she was tired. To be disbelieved, to be worried and badgered about a lover whom she had rejected of her own accord, and who was now about to console himself with another woman, seemed too cruel, and unjust. Friendless and alone, as she was, there was no one to help or advise her. She loathed the hour in which she first met Dick ; she almost hated him for having brought such trouble upon her ; just for a little bit of flirtation, a few idle words of love, to be punished like this—certainly it was unendurable. She had meant nothing serious, a May-day fancy only, which, once dismissed from her mind, should have been forgotten by every one else ; and, which were it not for the headstrong passion of her lover, might have resulted in no serious consequences. She was not even flattered by the persistency of his affection, for had he remained abroad, and never written to her, all would have been well. She was impatient

at her helplessness, and angry with every one concerned

At five o'clock Miss Fenchurch entered the room with a cup of tea and a plate of muffins. "Hilary sent you this," she said, with a studied air of indifference.

"Why, I am not a prisoner?" cried Evelyn, starting up dishevelled from the bed where she was lying.

"He thought that just now, perhaps, you would rather not come down."

"And the servants, what will they think? Tell him I am obliged for the tea, but I shall certainly make a point of appearing at dinner."

"Evelyn, do not make Hilary angry," warned Miss Fenchurch.

"Angry! it is I who am angry. I told him the truth, and he does not believe me. Rachel, now say, do I look like a guilty wife?"

She threw herself impulsively into the old maid's arms. "*You* believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, my dear!" said Miss Fenchurch, gently disentangling herself from the embrace, and speaking soothingly, as she might to a naughty child, "I am quite

sure you would not be so wicked as to deceive Hilary, the very best of men. *You* know what his truth and honour are, and how much he thinks of them."

"But I have truth and honour too," said Evelyn, tearfully, "and I have done nothing wrong, except, perhaps, to marry him."

"Hush, my dear!" Miss Fenchurch looked as shocked as possible at such a sentiment. "You must try and deserve his favour and not irritate him with your obstinacy, and I will tell him, that, on account of the servants, you think it better to come down to dinner. He will quite understand, for he detests anything like a family quarrel before one's inferiors."

It is probable that had Lady Fenchurch really been guilty of a grave crime for which she was enduring agonies of remorse, she could scarcely have suffered more than she did at that instant from the pangs of wounded self-love, anxiety, and angry pique. For a great passion strips insignificant things of all their sting and in its vastness merges all petty miseries.

CHAPTER XX.

DICK rode home thoughtfully. Some people would have called it a stroke of luck that Evelyn, contrary to the rapaciousness of her sex, should so easily have consented to resign him to another. Yet he felt aggrieved and at the same time more easy in his mind. The next morning he received Lady Fenchurch's letter. As soon as he found himself on the terrace, where he now regularly smoked his morning cigar, with Luce by his side, he pulled it out of his pocket.

“There, Luce, there is a letter from the woman I loved so foolishly. She does not care a bit for me, but you were justified in making me write to her.” Luce read, and, when she had done so, smoothed out the letter carefully.

“I think she did care, Dick, but she is

evidently proud and right-minded. Well, all is clear before you now, at any rate."

"She was a heartless coquette!" Dick puffed, vehemently at his cigar.

"No, no, Dick! don't reproach her, and try to be a little happy with me," she said, gently.

"You angel!" said Dick, rapturously. Kindly feeling and absence of envy seemed a rare thing in his young experience.

"Not an angel, please; nobody was ever in love with an angel, and I want you"—hesitating—"to love me some day, Dick."

"The some day will be sooner than you think, perhaps." He took her hand kindly.

"Don't talk nonsense, Dick—why here is Granny."

It was indeed Granny come out in the sunshine to look at her two dear children—the children of her old age, who had succeeded in making her heart glad.

"Vincent wants you in the stables, Dick," she said in her kind voice, as Dick hurried up and offered his arm. "Never mind me now, Luce will help the old woman."

Luce brightly accepted the trust, and her lover departed, whistling.

He found Uncle Vincent pacing up and down the yard, speaking in a loud angry voice to the stable-men, who flew to execute his behests. “A parcel of lazy, idle, good-for-nothing blockheads,” he was saying. “I’ve a great mind to sack you all; don’t know your business, and don’t want to know it, and get drunk whenever you can.” Uncle Vincent had been drinking too, the tip of his nose was redder than usual, and his voice was rasping and coarse.

“What is it?” said Dick, appearing smiling and fresh as a rose-bud on the scene. Fortune was dealing kindly enough with him just now, and her favours were written in the clear eye and lazy contented voice.

“Ah, is that you, Dick? Come here, I want a word with you, my dear fellow. I must have your advice—listen.” He drew him aside while the stable-men clattered to and fro with their buckets. “Fairy Queen has broken down!”

“Broken down!” Dick stood aghast. Only this very instant he had felt so confident in his good luck.

“There is nothing to be done—we must scratch her.”

“What! is the thing already known?” gasped Dick.

“It was in the paper this morning.” Uncle Vincent drew out and unfolded a crumpled piece of pink paper he had thrust into his pocket. “Those touts know everything—cursed brutes —”

“And you haven’t hedged?” murmured Dick, as the letters danced before his eyes.

“Scarcely at all, and we shall have to pay up shortly.”

“It will be very inconvenient,” said Dick.

“More than inconvenient for me—it’s impossible,” answered uncle Vincent.

“What is to be done? Why did you ever persuade me into this?” angrily said Dick.

“Oh, come, you’re of age. You could judge for yourself,” said uncle Vincent, spitefully.

“Granny won’t like my asking her again for money, just now, too, when I’m engaged to be married,” Dick reflected.

“That’s true, then; I heard a rumour of it —”

“It is true. Now what do you propose?”

“We must pay up. I could manage 300*l.* or 400*l.* I think if I tried.”

“But I had backed her for as much. I tell you what it is. My mother has just given a cheque of three hundred to my wife for the girls’ lessons, clothes, &c. I saw it in her desk; I’ll get her to hand it over to me, and you can make it good later on. If you will cash it at West Thorpe this afternoon I can pay the fellow at once, for I should not like to send a cheque of my mother’s to Jimmy Shaw, who made the bet.”

“Well, I suppose if the cheque is your wife’s you can let the girls wait a bit; but it is the very last time, Uncle Vincent, I will have anything to do with your racing transactions—I am not going to bet any more —”

“Of course not,” said his uncle, putting the tip of his forefinger somewhat irreverently up to his nose, “of course not; ‘when the Devil was sick’—we all know the rest.”

“If you want me to cash that cheque you had better make haste,” interrupted Dick; “I am going into West Thorpe immediately, and I must collect all my own ready-money. to pay off those idiotic bets.”

Dick proved as good as his word. He cashed the cheque at the bank, and having settled, not without considerable difficulty, his own share in the transaction, he dismissed the subject lightly from his mind, and proceeded to stroll about the town. Suddenly he remembered that he had lost his watch-key, and resolved to go into Cherry and Appleton's and buy another. While the attentive shopman was serving him, Dick noticed a parcel lying on the counter directed to Lady Fenchurch. The name attracted his attention, and he got up to look a little closer.

“Ah, that,” said the assistant, noticing the direction of his eyes, “is a parcel we are just sending to Lady Fenchurch; it contains her pearl necklace—a very fine one—a birthday present from Sir Hilary; he is a gentleman of great taste. Her ladyship called here and left it herself two days ago, and desired particularly that it might be sent her to-day without delay; she is most anxious to wear it on Friday evening. It is rather a long way to send by hand, but we were afraid there might be some delay if we

trusted to the post, and her ladyship was so very particular."

"How do you send it?"

"By hand—by special messenger. It is a little inconvenient, but we are most anxious not to disappoint her ladyship, who is a very good customer."

"Of course——" Dick hesitated. "I have to ride past the lodge-gates this afternoon on business of my own—I suppose it would not be any assistance to you if I offered to leave it."

"I am sure it would, sir; I will just speak to Mr. Cherry."

Mr. Cherry, a bland obese personage, on being applied to, came forward civilly and thanked Dick. "We shall be much obliged to you, sir, if you will kindly take the trouble to leave it."

Dick pocketed the parcel, and, with a lingering feeling of pleasure at being the fortunate means of doing any little service for his lady-love, rode off quickly. He had not gone many miles before he met Gubbins primed with interesting intelligence and effusive bustle.

"So glad to see you, my dear fellow; a

most important voter lives near here ; you must come with me at once ; he is very troublesome, and wants a great deal of persuasion," said Gubbins, warmly.

" But I am on my way to Fairholt." Dick did not like to mention that he had promised to leave a parcel for Lady Fenchurch ; he was not quite certain if she would approve.

" Never mind, you can go there afterwards," said the agent.

Dick reluctantly turned his horse's head and followed Gubbins. The interview proved longer and more vexatious than they had anticipated ; the afternoon waned, and what with the talk and the worry, and Slyforth's monopolization of all his thoughts, Dick completely forgot the parcel with which he had been entrusted. The next day he started again early, and the packet which his valet had extracted from the pocket of his coat, and laid in his master's drawer, again failed to recur to Dick's memory. In fact, when later on these trivial facts assumed a terrible importance, Dick could not remember what he had done with the necklace, and only retained the distinct recollection of having put it in his pocket. He had

been so absorbed, and engrossed, with the business of electioneering, that he ceased to take a real interest in anything else. He liked the sense of being flattered and consulted, and feeling himself a person of importance. He was remarkably sensitive to the good opinion of his neighbours, while taking little pains to conciliate it; he liked to be the best mounted and the best dressed man at the covert side; he liked to be thought and rated as a good shot, and asked to join the best battues in the neighbourhood. In short, he liked to be talked about and praised. He would have preferred to conduct battues of his own (but in this case Granny was inexorable; she would spend no unnecessary money in rearing quantities of fat pheasants merely for the satisfaction of so-called sportsmen, whose habit it is ruthlessly to slaughter and to sell them, thus converting sport into a mercantile transaction), and in his own mind he already drew a flattering and agreeable picture of himself as a popular M.P., and a personage in the arena of politics. Each day that passed confirmed him more and more in the conviction that Lady Fenchurch's marriage had been a

fortunate thing for him. If the clandestine love affair had dragged on ; if Sir Hilary had ever heard of it, and made a troublesome fuss, as he might have done, being neither a Londoner nor a heartless *roué*, but only a sober practical country squire, jealous of his name and his honour ; if Luce had not been as she was—the sweetest and the most amiable of her sex, and allied to Lady Eleanor Highview, whose connections, being of the most excellent blue blood, were necessarily of great assistance in all social requirements ; had all these various things been different he would probably have cursed his luck about Fairy Queen, and done his best to feel miserable. As it was, the polling-day approached, and his prospects were fair. The finest anticipations are always raised by untried horses, and the balance of probability in the result of the fickle mob's favour seemed rapidly to point towards Dick's candidature.

Luce had returned to Highview nominally on the score of propriety (now that her engagement was gradually hinted abroad, though still supposed to be involved in mystery), but, as Dick laughingly de-

clared, really in order to spend her aunt's fortune in laces and ribbons preparatory to spending his. Old Mrs. Carrol was duly closeted with her lawyer for a portion of every day discussing ways and means, marriage settlements, younger children's portions, and widows' jointures, and all the legal jargon which provides for a woman from the time of her birth till the day of her death, and never leaves her a free agent for an instant. Mrs. Vincent, surrounded by Dolly and Eliza, concocted spring garments out of the remains of last year's wardrobe, and the booty of which she had rifled Granny's drawers.

The family were thus employed one morning when Mrs. Carrol, having emerged from her study to ask a question of Dick, who, sauntering up and down smoking, merely put in his head at the long window, holding his cigar behind his back that the smoke might not incommodate his grandmother. The family, thus innocently and harmoniously collected, might have seemed basking in the sunshine of prosperity, and to have entered on a new career of happiness and favour. Mrs. Vincent certainly

was still troubled with a few pricks of envy, as she watched the two brown heads of Dolly and Eliza bent over their needle-work, and remembered that this fine house, with all it contained, would pass into the hands of a young lady she had once denominated a minx ; still, even she had by this time schooled herself to the inevitable, and determined to be as amiable as the natural acidity of her temper would allow. It had therefore something of the effect of a thunder-bolt when Uncle Vincent, in riding-gaiters, with splashed clothes and a heightened colour, burst into the room, and exclaimed, in loud, imprudent tones : “ Here’s a pretty kettle of fish ! ”

Dolly and Eliza looked up in amused astonishment. Mrs. Vincent dropped her work, and Mrs. Carrol, fearing some calamity, laid a trembling hand on the edge of the large marble-topped table, while Dick, still holding his cigar behind him, moved a step forward.

“ What do you think these d——d Tories have done ? ”

“ What ? ” cried every one at once.

“ Oh, Vincent, I thought from your face

there had been a death," gasped Granny, who now turned quite pale.

"Look! just look!" Uncle Vincent held a flaming red poster in his hand. "They are placarded everywhere, the town is swarming with 'em, they have broken out like summer blisters—it's all up with you, Dick, I expect."

"What is it?"

Dick now dropped his cigar and strode into the room. He seized the placard, of which Aunt Vincent's keen glance had already gained a fair idea, read it, and looked around at the party with stupid staring eyes.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Granny, in her soft, gentle voice.

"It is an insult—a lie," said Dick, hotly. "I must go and see about it at once."

"My dear boy, don't fret; perhaps it's only an election squib," said Granny.

"It is worse than that—it's a formal accusation."

"Who accuses you—and of what?" she said, quickly.

"Well, it's deuced nasty, I must say," remarked Uncle Vincent; "they call him a thief; there's no mistake about it, it is all plump and plain."

“Such a thing must be actionable,” objected Granny. “How can they dare——”

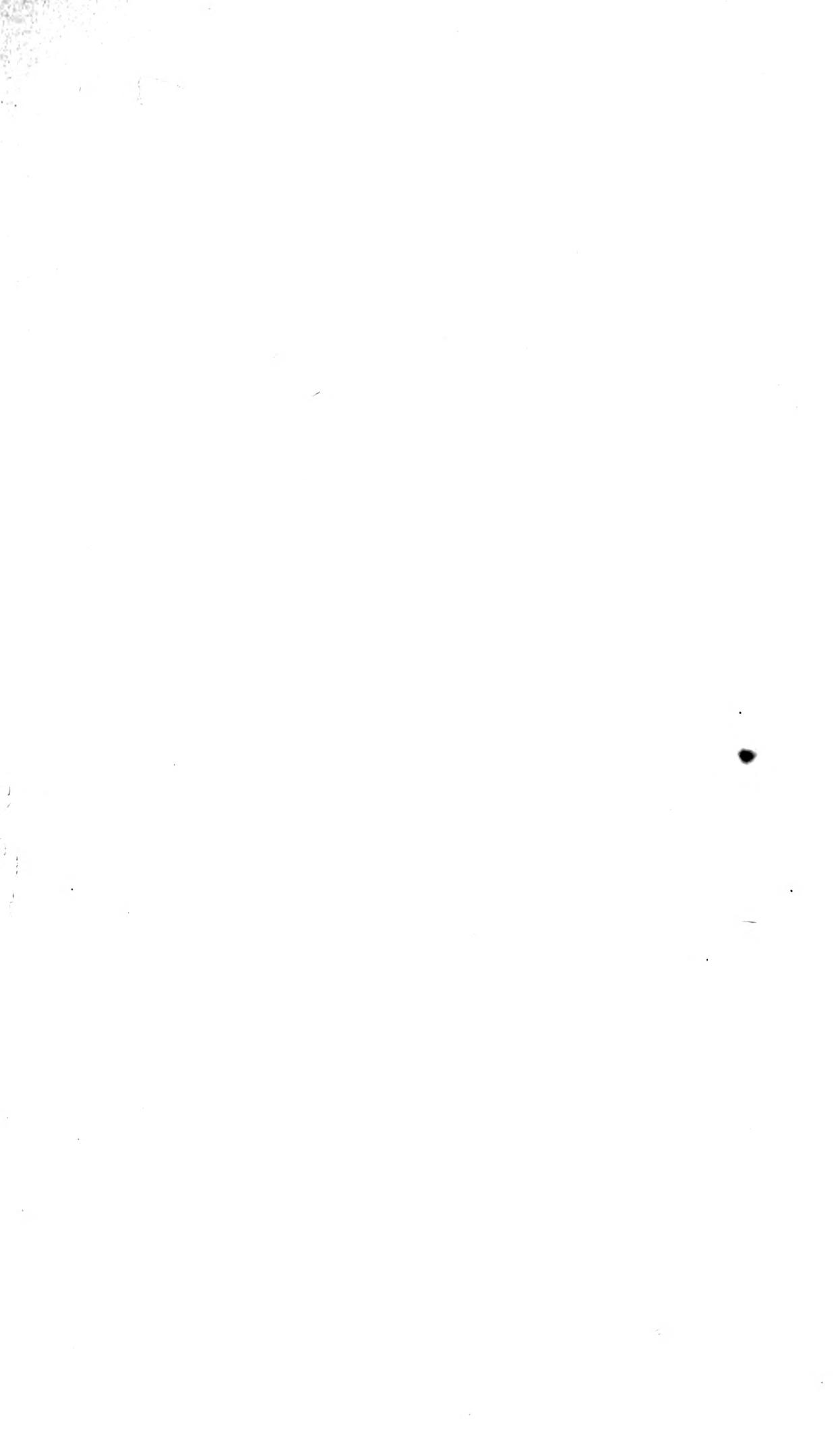
“At election time people dare all.”

“Perhaps it is true; what have you done, Dick?” said Aunt Vincent, quietly.

“True!”

Dick gave his aunt a look which, had she been more sensitive, must have withered her, and fled from the room, followed by Uncle Vincent. The red placard lay on the floor, where Dick had thrown it. Aunt Vincent picked it up and read it carefully; then suddenly looking round she exclaimed, “Dolly—Eliza, good gracious! run, get salts and eau-de cologne, and call the servants—be quick, d’ye hear—don’t you see—Granny has fainted!”

END OF VOL. I.











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